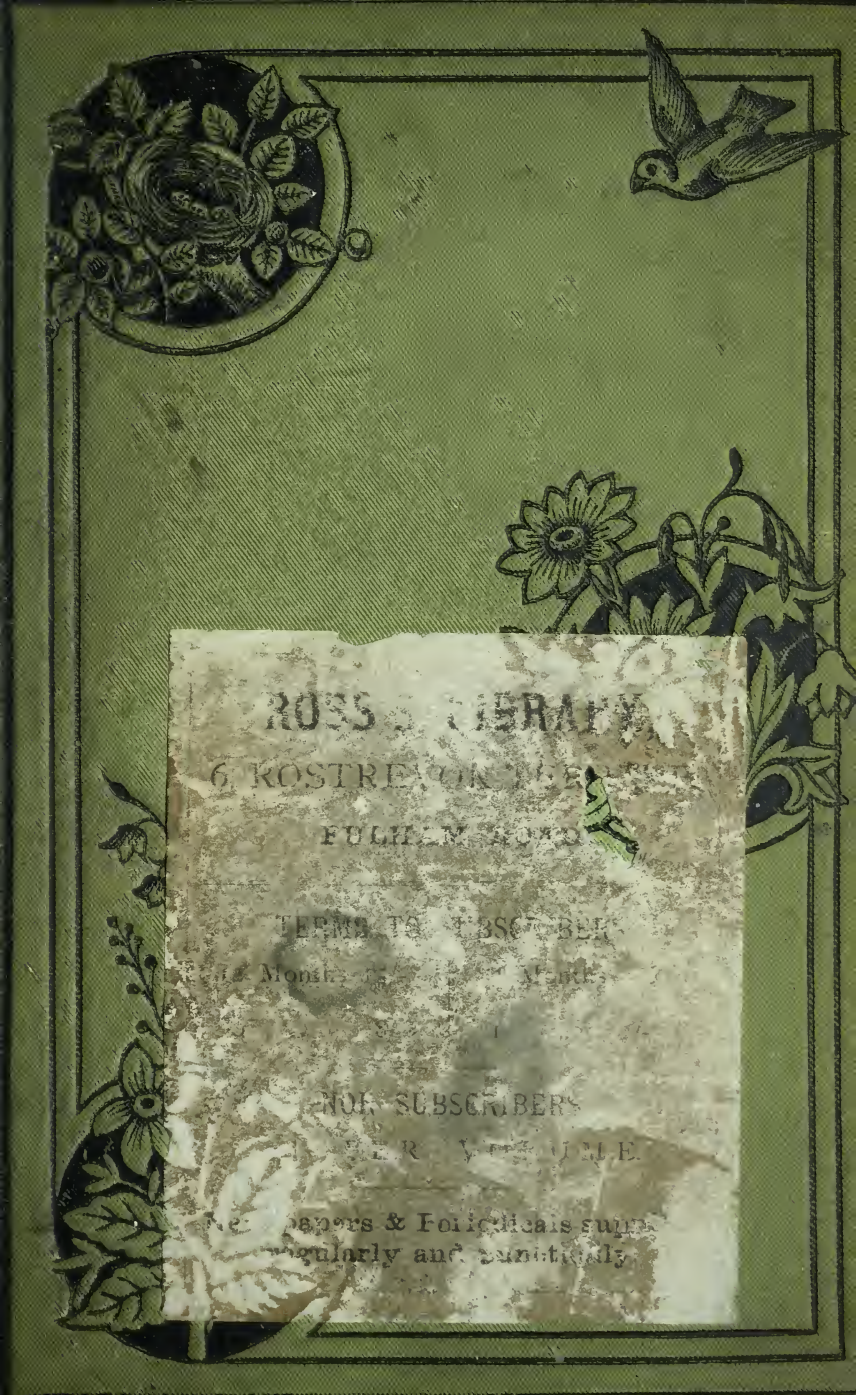
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WHAT HE COST HER.

BY

JAMES PAYN,

AUTHOR OF "LOST SIR MASSINGBERD," "WALTER'S WORD," "FALLEN FORTUNES," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

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WHAT HE COST HER.

CHAPTER I.

WELLINGTONS IN EMBRYO.

Above all the sounds that human ingenuity has invented to stir the heart of man, the bugle-call stands pre-eminent. It does not require for its appreciation imagination in the hearer, nor a particular phase of mind, nor a taste for music. The very charger pricks his ears and dilates his nostrils as he listens to it; and through the misty morning air it rings its reveille bright and clear, and spirit-stirring as the "breezy call of incense-breathing morn" itself.

And yet there was no sound so hateful to the gentlemen-cadets of the Military Academy at Woolwich, when it awoke them for extra drill. We are speaking, it must be premised, of a far,

far-back time—not in years, indeed, but as respects the progress of Humanity, which, as everybody knows, has taken such prodigious strides of late as to leave, not only our forefathers, but our very fathers, aghast at the perfection of their descendants. We have no doubt that in these days the bugle-call to early drill, being the call of duty—albeit a disagreeable one—is eagerly welcomed by the Woolwich cadet. He has doubtless marched step by step with the rest of the great army of our youth—and presumably in much better time—on the road to what one of the greatest philosophers of the age has denominated "bestness," and is highly principled, deeply religious, though competitive—"a Christian first and a gentleman afterwards;" in brief, a sort of personified "Whole Duty of Man," gilt-edged, and bound in dark blue, and always pronounced by his reviewer, who is the Commander-in-Chief, "in habit studious, and in conduct exemplary."

We all know the story of that unconsciously cynical child, who asked of his mamma in the churchyard, "Where are all the bad people buried?" and, like him, when I read the narratives, put forth nowadays, descriptive of our young gentlemen at school—all, I suppose, more or less trustworthy—I am tempted to inquire, "Where are all the bad boys brought up?"

What becomes of them? Is the race extinct or do they all run away to sea, as only the very worst of them used to do, and become "stowaways" in over-insured and presently-to-be-scuttled vessels? The question becomes as interesting as that of "hybernation" used to be in White-of-Selborne's time. They are not here. Where have they got to? Even if one offered a reward for a bad boy—we are speaking, of course, of boys of the upper classes only, though even the lower ones are being made angels of by the school boards at the rate of a thousand a week—we doubt whether we should secure a specimen. At the period of which we write, the good boy was about as rare a creature as the kingfisher or the otter; while the goody-goody boy, now so common as to be somewhat obtrusive, was almost as unknown as the dodo. One or two of these latter, driven by stress of circumstances, were indeed known to stray into the very spot we are now describing—the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich; but they were treated with such barbarity by the aborigines, who had a distaste amounting to fanaticism for anything of the sort, that they fled away immediately, or perished as martyrs.

It is half-past five on a fine summer morning, and the sun is shining brightly into a high,

white-walled apartment, in which Gentleman-cadet Cecil Henry Landon, "head of the room," and three others are lying, each on their "narrow beds" of iron, after the pattern of that patronised by the great Duke of Wellington, whose well-known figure, with uplifted finger, was at that epoch still to be seen in London streets. They are asleep, and therefore out of mischief; nor do their upturned faces, even in that powerful light, exhibit any signs of marked deformity. That of Landon is a very handsome one, though the handsomest part of it, his soft hazel eyes, are at present closed. His features are regular, and, if rather large, it must be said in their excuse that he is a tall young fellow. He has symptoms of a dark moustache, upon which the military authorities have already passed censure —for in those days moustachios were not permitted except to the cavalry—and on his sunburnt cheeks there is that amount of down, for the removal of which wags recommend the cat's tongue instead of the razor. One arm, as white as a girl's and as strong as a navvy's, is thrown upon the coverlet, and with the other he supplements the pillow, which is of "regulation" size —that is, about half the proper dimensions. There is a smile upon his face, so let us hope he is dreaming of his mother, who has, however,

been dead these ten years, and does not recur very often to his waking thoughts.

In the next corner—all the beds are placed in the angles of the room, as though they were playing at puss in the corner—lies Hugh Darall, Landon's chief friend and ally. In character they are the antipodes of one another, which is, perhaps, one of the bonds of their friendship. Darall is diligent and painstaking, and, though a year junior to his friend, is much more distinguished as a student. It is almost time for Landon to pass for his commission, and he will doubtless do so when that period arrives, for he has plenty of brains; but he will not take a high place. He is too fond of pleasure to have much time for study; and he regrets his backwardness for one reason only—he will be in the artillery, whereas Darall is "safe to get the sappers" (the engineers), which will deprive him of his companionship. The trifling advantage in the way of pay that the one service offers above the other is of no consequence to Landon, who is the only son of a rich City merchant; but it is of great importance to Darall, who is the only son of his mother, who is a poor widow. Darall is a strong, well-built young fellow, but not so handsome as his friend; his complexion

is one of those delicate ones which will not take the sun-burn, and his hair is of that colour which, though it grows tawny with years, has in youth a fluffy appearance. A disciple of Lavater would, however, give this lad the preference over his fellow in the way of moral qualities: his mouth is firmer, his chin is squarer, and his blue eyes, as they open for a moment while the bugle blares and shrills in the parade-ground without, are much more steadfast. For a moment they open, as do those of the other two occupants of the apartment—younger lads, who are in subjection to their seniors—then close in serene content. Those three are in the happy position of that retired naval officer, who made his servant call him at some small number of "bells" every morning, that he might have the pleasure of throwing a boot at him, and going to sleep again. They had not to get up; whereas Landon was in for "extra drill." His eyes remain open, and in his reluctant ears the martial music continues to blare on.

"Confound the bugle!" exclaims he, passionately; then puts forth a hand to the socks upon the chair beside him, and proceeds to attire himself in his regimentals. Even they are old-world and forgotten now; something

between the famous "Windsor uniform" and that of the telegraph boys—light-blue trousers with a red stripe; a dark-blue coat, turned up with red, and with metal buttons; and a really becoming forage-cap with a gold band. If anybody is ever good-looking at 5.45 A.M., and before he has washed himself, Cecil Henry Landon might claim to be so, as he stands equipped for drill. He has a minute or two still to spare, and "never waste time" is the family motto engraved upon his gold watch. He takes up the regulation pillow, and, moving towards Darall, poises it above his head; but a troubled look in the sleeper's face arrests his attention, and causes him to change his purpose. "No, Hugh, you shall sleep on," he mutters; "this will be an ugly day for you—a monstrous unpleasant case of 'yes' or 'no' you will have to settle—and it shan't trouble you before it is time. But as for these young beggars"—and he turned rather savagely towards the two younger lads—"it is not to be endured that they should be thus enjoying themselves while their senior officer—at least, I was an officer till the governor broke me—encounters all the hardships of his profession."

At the middle syllable of the word pro-

fession, he brought the pillow down with a thwack upon the nose of the nearest sleeper.

"Eh—what the devil——! Oh, it's you, Landon!" exclaimed the suddenly-awakened youth, running the whole gamut of expression from wrath to conciliation in a breath.

"Yes; it's me, Trotter," answered the other, mimicking; "ain't I a second father to you? Here you are oversleeping yourself and running the risk of arrest, when the bugle is just going to sound for the second time for extra drill."

"But I'm not down for extra drill," expostulated Trotter.

"Then you're a deuced lucky fellow," observed Landon, coolly. "It must be this lazy Whymper that wants to be woke;" and, with a sharp and adroit movement, which showed practice in the art, he pulled away the pillow, on which the other young gentleman was sleeping the sleep of innocence—or at all events of forgetfulness of his crimes—and brought his head down, with a bang, upon the iron framework of the bed.

"Hullo—oh dear me—did you please to want anything, Landon?" said Whymper, rubbing his eyes and the back of his head coincidently, yet at the same time contriving to present a respectful air.

"Yes, I do. I want to know what the deuce you mean by destroying the property of Her Majesty's Master-General of the Ordnance by dashing your thick head against your bed bars; I do believe you have obliterated the broad arrow. There's the second bugle! It's too late now for you to be at extra drill, you young sluggard."

"But, indeed, Landon, though I am much obliged to you for waking me, I am not down for—— What an abominable ruffian! Did you ever see such an unmitigated beast, Trotter?"

The last part of the sentence was spoken by Gentleman-cadet Whymper, after Gentleman-cadet Landon had rushed from the room to the parade-ground, and in a tone that bore every mark of genuineness and deep feeling. The speaker was a fat and rosy youth, with projecting eyes, which had gained for him the appellation of the Lobster.

"Your sentiments are mine, Lobby, to a T," responded Trotter, whose frame was still quivering with mirth at his companion's discomfiture; "but let us be thankful that our friend is now being tormented by two drill-sergeants while we are lying at ease."

"But I am not at ease," answered the other

testily; "I have a lump on my head as big as a hen's egg."

"Well, let *me* be thankful, Lobby, and have my sleep out;" and without waiting for the desired permission, off he went at once into the land of dreams.

Gentleman-cadet Whymper picked up his bolster, but found it little to his liking; the lump in his head had become one of the finest organs that ever met the eye of a phrenologist.

"Confound that Landon!" exclaimed he passionately; "of all the vile, abominable, and hateful wretches—of all the monsters in human form—if you can call him human—I do think——"

"Who is it that you are talking about, sir?" inquired the authoritative voice of Senior-cadet Darall, whom Landon's onslaught upon the two "neuxes," as the last-joined cadets were called, had awakened, in spite of his solicitude to avoid disturbing him.

"I was thinking of those infamous scoundrels who mauled poor Bright and Jefferson, at Charlton Fair, yesterday," observed the Lobster, in his most dulcet tone.

Darall smiled lugubriously. The smile, and,

perhaps, the melancholy also, encouraged Mr. Whymper to continue the conversation.

"I suppose, Darall, there is to be no change in the arrangements for two o'clock drill to-day; we are to obey orders?"

"Whose orders?" inquired the other dryly, "those of the officer in command, or of the old cadets?"

"Of the old cadets, of course," answered the Lobster. He had not only come out of his shell by this time, and was all softness, but was in addition, as it were, oiled, as if for a mayonnaise; "no one cares about the officers, I should hope."

"Why I expect to be an officer myself, you young scoundrel, or at least to go down to the Arsenal, within the next six months."

"Oh, then of course that will be different," answered the other unblushingly. "If all the officers were like you, nobody would wish to disobey them. It is only the governor and the captain of the company, and those two disgusting lieutenants——"

"One of them is my first cousin, sir," interrupted Darall, sternly.

"Nay, I like that one; we all like that one," observed Whymper obsequiously; "it is the other that is such a beast."

"Which of the two lieutenants of the Cadet Company do you call a beast, Mr. Whymper?"

Mr. Whymper was to the last degree disconcerted. The chances were exactly even that he should get himself into a hole, by picking out the wrong lieutenant. But fortunately for him, Darall was a good-natured fellow, slow to anger, and with a touch of humour which—except in the case of great villains, when it takes a grim and cruel form—has always a softening influence upon character. He was called by the younger cadets, or "snookers"—the poor creatures had many a derogatory alias—"Gentleman Darall," and by his contemporaries, we are afraid somewhat in derision, "the Snookers' Friend." It was not, however, his friendliness that protected Mr. Whymper on this occasion so much as his indifference. He seemed to have forgotten that he had put that crucial question about his first cousin at all, and was gazing earnestly out of the window, through which came the abrupt sounds of command from the drill-ground, as though the familiar words had some new interest for him.

"There will be a precious lot of extra drill, I expect, after to-day's business?" observed Whymper interrogatively.

For a neux to ask frivolous questions of an old cadet was in general a dangerous imperti-

nence—something like playing with a tiger's tail; but there was a certain fascination about it to Mr. Whymper, who belonged to that large order of persons who had rather the king said to them, "Go to the devil," than receive no notice from majesty whatever; and, moreover, this tiger was a tame tiger.

"I suppose so," answered Darall, abstractedly.

"And are we to remain at the fair till night, or return for evening parade?" continued the other. "One might just as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, and I shall certainly vote for staying."

"*You* vote!" ejaculated Darall, in a tone of scorn equal to a folio. No Tory peer could have uttered "*You* vote!" to a costermonger with more contempt. You would have imagined that Gentleman-cadet Whymper was not a vertebrate animal, and indeed he wished himself a snail that he might have had a shell to creep into. It did not mitigate his embarrassment to perceive his friend Trotter alive to the situation, and making faces at him expressive of lively enjoyment of it. "This is what comes, my dear fellow," said the faces, "of 'sponging,'" a word indicative, in the Royal Military Academy, of an attempt to conciliate one's superiors, and of such extensive application there that any devotional

observance, or rather the bare idea of it, was stigmatised as "sponging on Providence."

The return of Landon from extra drill at that moment was a positive relief to Mr. Whymper, notwithstanding that that gentleman's presence generally brought some inconvenience with it, as indeed it did on the present occasion.

"Now you snookers!" cried he, skimming his forage-cap, with skilful accuracy, on Mr. Trotter's nose, and unbuckling his belt with a certain vicious snap, the significance of which was well understood by those whom he addressed; "it's a lovely morning, and you must go out and enjoy it. 'Better to hunt the field for health unbought, than fee the doctor for a nauseous draught,' says the poet. I want to have some private talk with Darall."

Neither young gentleman needed any further recommendation of this healthful suggestion, but each—with his eyes furtively fixed upon the belt, which seemed to have a sort of basilisk attraction for them—rose from his couch, and commenced his toilette.

"You can wash afterwards," observed Landon curtly; "go and stand under the window, and when I chuck the soap-dish or something at you, then you will know that you may come upstairs again."

"All right," said Trotter, as he vanished through the door.

"Thank you very much," said Whymper, meaning doubtless to acknowledge the consideration of Landon's arrangement. A clothes-brush from that gentleman's unerring hand hissed through the air, and smote his retreating figure as he followed his more agile companion.

CHAPTER II.

THE TEMPTER.

"WHAT a wretched sneak and sycophant that Whymper is," ejaculated Landon, as he sat down by his friend's pillow.

"How can it be otherwise under such a system," observed the other coldly. "He will be open and brutal enough, you may be sure, when he comes to have the upper hand."

"Well, the system is good enough for me, Hugh, so long as it lasts, which will not be very long in my case. I only hope it won't be equally short in yours; that is what I am going to talk to you about."

"So I guessed," answered Darall, gravely. "I am obliged to you, my dear fellow, for I know you mean me well; but all the talking in the world won't help me—that is if this Charlton business is to go on."

"Well, I am afraid it is. Those two young beggars—Bright and What's-his-name—really got it very hot from the Fair people. The news from hospital is that What's-his-name's leg is broken."

"Jefferson's? I am sorry for it; but I don't believe he was worse beaten than when Rayner thrashed him with a wicket the other day."

"Very likely not; but then that was administered by authority."

"Authority!" echoed Darall, impatiently. "He was beaten within an inch of his life, because Rayner has a bad temper, and happens to have been at 'the shop' a certain number of years."

"Just so, he is an old cadet, a position which confers certain privileges. Old families are looked up to in the country, and their cadets permitted to do pretty much what they please upon exactly the same ground. They have existed a certain number of years, and that is put down to their credit. One can't prevent people being idiots."

"We needn't make the world worse than it is, Landon, that is my argument. However, I don't want to debate the matter. It is probable, as you say, that after to-day's work you and I may not have any personal interest in any system in vogue in this Academy. It will be very little

satisfaction to my poor mother to know that the roughs at Charlton Fair have been paid out for what they have done to Bright and Jefferson, when she learns at the same time that I have lost my chance in life."

"Pooh, pooh, Darall, you won't lose it. I shall lose it, of course; I have had too many bad marks against me, already, to allow of old Pipeclay giving me quarter. He will be glad of the opportunity of getting rid of me. But you —why, you are a pattern cadet. If they send you away, where are their good young gentlemen to come from? He daren't do it. I don't think he will even put you back on the list; for he must put others in front of you, who will have transgressed as much as yourself, and without half so good a character. He won't make a corporal of Whymper, for instance, I suppose; if he does, I'll throttle the fellow the very first time I see him in his embroidered collar."

"That would help me a good deal," said Darall, bitterly.

"Well, it would, you know, because it would make a vacancy, and discourage others from superseding you. But, seriously, I think you needn't be apprehensive of anything serious."

"Sir Hercules told me only last week," said Darall, slowly, "that he looked to me to set a

good example, and that if I failed him, by committing any act of insubordination, he would be down upon me more than on others, since it was plain that I knew better."

"That's what comes of being virtuous," observed Landon, gravely. "He never ventured to threaten me in that way. Give old Pipeclay an inch—in the way of good conduct—and he's apt to expect an ell. Therefore I never gave him so much as a barley-corn. Nobody can say I have not been prudent in that way. I have aroused no expectations from the first. I came into "the Shop" low in my batch—played under my game as it were—on purpose that I might always take it easy as to work; and as to morals—I have not left a great deal of margin. I was made an under-officer, only to be broken the next fortnight, and have got into all sorts of rows besides. But, then, my dear fellow, you have no idea how I have enjoyed myself!"

The naïveté of this remark, uttered as it was in a tone of cheerful frankness, brought a smile into Darall's face in spite of himself. It was hard to be angry with Landon; even the neuxes (with one or two exceptions, however) admired this handsome, reckless young fellow, full of gaiety and good spirits, and forgot his sharp treatment more quickly than they forgave that

of others. It had always somewhat of the flavour of a practical joke.

"You have a happy nature, Landon," said Darall, with a half sigh; "and, besides, you are in a position to do as you like. If you were 'bunked' to-morrow, it would make no difference to you—or very little."

"Well, no; I do believe that the governor—I don't mean old Pipeclay, but *my* governor—would be rather pleased than otherwise to hear I was expelled, as in that case there would be some chance of my becoming a business man. But it will be a horrid bore for me; the notion of a high desk, with a box full of red wafers—they use wafers in that hole in the City, for I have seen them—ledgers, day-books, and mail-days, is anything but agreeable to me. But there, what is my trouble, as you are doubtless thinking, compared with yours?"

"No, Landon, I am making no comparisons. But what makes it very bitter to me is the thought that my prospects—and someone else's (one's mother is one's mother, you know)—are about to be sacrificed for a shadow, if indeed there is a shadow of cause for it. This Charlton business has always been prohibited, since the last row there five years ago. These two young rascals knew it; knew how we were hated—and

not without reason—by the Fair people; and yet they must go there and kick up a row. If the truth were known, they doubtless deserved all they got."

"I have no doubt they did," answered the other with mock gravity, "but the insult must be avenged. Bex is quite fixed upon that point. 'The honour of the whole Cadet Company,' said he, at our meeting of the heads of rooms last night, 'is at stake, and must be preserved at any cost.' You know what an enormous fool Bex is, and can imagine his manner. I was called to order for laughing at it!"

"I can easily believe that," answered Darall, gloomily.

"I must say for Bex, however," continued Landon, "that he sacrifices himself to his notion of *esprit de corps*. For being the senior cadet of the Company, who will give us the word of command to disobey standing orders, he is quite certain to get his *congé*. It is a case of very determined suicide indeed."

"I don't suppose Bex has anybody dependent upon him, as I have," observed Darall, coldly.

"I should think not," answered Landon; "it would be altogether contrary to the fitness of things that anyone should be dependent upon Bex. The Cadet Company will lose in him the

soul of (mistaken) chivalry, though not one pennyweight of common sense. But as for you, Darall, it can't afford to lose you; and I have a plan to preserve you to it. Look here, my good fellow, you must go down to hospital."

"Go down to hospital!" repeated Darall; "what for?"

"Because you are very ill. You have not been able to sleep all night for neuralgia; that's always the safest thing, being invisible, uncomeatable—and also because they know nothing about it—to stump the doctors. You have been suffering torments from neuralgia, as I will certify upon the Evangels, if my word as a gentleman-cadet should prove insufficient. There are two witnesses—there they are under the window—who will corroborate my testimony in every particular, or I will know the reason why. Not, of course, that any such evidence will be necessary. A man of your character and antecedents has only to say to the medical officer, 'I have neuralgia,' and off you go—in a litter if you like—to Ward No. 2; it looks out upon the garden, and there's a man on the premises, I know, who will send you up some rum-shrub in a basket. You can come back again to-morrow, when all this business is over—

why shouldn't you? neuralgia comes and goes in an hour — and be complimented by old Pipeclay, perhaps by the Master of the Ordnance himself, for not having 'sullied a career of promise by so flagrant a disobedience of orders as, he was sorry to say, has disgraced nineteen-twentieths of your contemporaries.' The sentence would be much longer, but that's his style. Then, so far from being placed lower down in the list for promotion, you will be at the top of it—vice Bex himself, perhaps, and a precious good thing for everybody too."

"And do you really think, Landon, that I am the kind of fellow to get out of a difficulty of this kind by a paltry evasion—that I would stoop to 'malinger' and sham——"

"I say 'easy over the stones,' my dear fellow," put in Landon, gravely. "I've shammed half-a-dozen times myself to get off church-parade and lots of things."

"Perhaps; but not to avoid the responsibility of doing right—or wrong. If I had the pluck to say, 'This going down to Charlton Fair is contrary to orders, and therefore I won't do it,' that would be all very well——"

"Oh, would it?" interrupted Landon, disdainfully. "It would be one of the most contemptible attempts at sponging that ever happened.

A thing that Whymper would have done, and I hope only Whymper amongst us all."

"I am not so sure that it would not be the right thing, Landon," continued the other; "I mean, as respects one's regimental duty. However, I am not strong enough—or weak enough, if you will—to adopt such a course. On the other hand, I ask you again, do you think I am the sort of man to shirk a great danger, and at the same time get an advantage over my companions, by an acted lie?"

"My dear fellow, of course you are not," answered Landon, with emphasis, "and that is the very reason why you should do it. Nobody will venture to impute such motives to any conduct of yours. You are in the position of a man who has unlimited credit, and, if you don't draw a bill for something worth having—in other words, when you have such a chance as this—you might just as well have no credit at all—like me. Look here, Darall, I am serious," added he, with energy, "there is nothing dishonourable in the matter. How can you talk of honour in such circumstances? On one side of the question are a couple of silly neuxes, who have been deservedly thrashed; Bex and his rhodomontades; what fellows will think of you—even if they come to know about it, which they never will—in short,

a collection of rubbish; while, on the other side, are your whole future prospects in life—your mother with an empty purse and a breaking heart. How can you doubt for a moment what is the wise, aye, and the right thing to do? For my part I shall say no more about it, but leave you to follow the dictates of your own good sense."

Taking some halfpence from his pocket he stepped to the open window, and discharged a volley of coppers upon the two neuxes beneath.

"Come up and wash yourselves, you young scoundrels," cried he, "and mind you don't make a row about it, for Darall has got neuralgia in his head, and wants to be quiet."

"I have not got neuralgia," remonstrated Darall.

"Yes, you have; or, at least you will have if you have got an ounce of brains for neuralgia to work upon. Hush, here they are," and making a gesture of silence to the two new-comers, Mr. Landon proceeded to perform his own ablutions softly, while they did the like.

Darall did not speak, which was, as his friend concluded, a point gained, and certainly he had a troubled look, like one in pain, which was another point. Landon was clever enough

to understand that self-interest is a more powerful arguer with every man than the most philosophic of friends; and, having sown the seed, he wisely left the crop to come up of itself.

CHAPTER III.

THE MARCH TO CHARLTON.

It is stated by the orthodox, that some belief in the existence of powers above us is necessary to every man; and therefore it is that we so often see the infidel so credulous as regards spirit-rapping, table-turning, and other idiotic phenomena; and the same may be said with at least equal truth of those who reject authority in mundane affairs. The workman who flies in the face of his employer is a bondsman to his trade's-union, and the patriot who scorns the tyrant is submissive enough to his revolutionary committee.

Thus at the Royal Military Academy, in the old times, before the flood of good behaviour had swept over all such institutions, there was a spirit of anarchy which, while it resented any lawful supervision or discipline, was subservient,

even to slavery, to any edict promulgated by the Cadet Company itself, in the persons of its leaders. No orders of secret society were ever carried out more scrupulously than those which emanated from the committee of old cadets, which sat *en permanence*—like Robespierre's—and made decrees as inviolable (and sometimes as ridiculous) as those of the Medes and Persians. Thews and sinews were, of course, at the back of the committee—such a thrashing as Winchester with its poor ash sticks has no idea of, would have awaited the disobedient; but besides that, there was a real authority exercised by the "under-officers," which, no doubt, added to its power. The boasted monitorial system, devised at our public schools to save the expense of a sufficiency of masters, was carried at Woolwich to extremity. The captain of a man-of-war, when at sea, was, in the days of which we speak, looked upon as an example of irresponsible power; but the relation of an "old cadet," or "a corporal" to his juniors at the Academy was infinitely more authoritative; and the Academy was always at sea. If the nature of this superior being was exceptionally good, no serious evils arose from the exercise of his power; but—we are speaking, it must be remembered, of an antediluvian epoch—all gentlemen-cadets were

not exceptionally good. Judged by a modern standard, a good many of them would have been pronounced exceptionally bad. And in that case it was exceptionally bad for the "snookers." Many will doubtless say it was the absence of classical literature, which, as the Latin poet tells us, acts as an emollient, that made these young military students so ferocious; plan drawing and the mathematics being their only mental pabulum, may, perhaps, have had the same effect upon them as is attributed to a diet of human flesh; but, at all events, they were a rough lot, and "old Pipeclay," as Major-General Sir Hercules Plummet, their governor, was familiarly termed, found them what the Scotch call "kittle cattle" to manage. He was not very exacting in the matter of moral restraint. His young gentlemen broke a good deal of the decalogue with comparative impunity, and committed a number of peccadilloes besides, unknown to ordinary law-breakers and law-makers, without even provoking official remonstrance; but against one particular crime old Pipeclay was fixed—he had "put his foot down" upon that article of the constitution which prohibited any gentleman-cadet from attending Charlton Fair.

Charlton Fair is now gone the way of all wickedness; but in the times of which I write

it flourished like a green bay-tree, in a locality somewhere to the south of the high-road that runs between Woolwich and Greenwich. Stern moralists were wont to find fault with the Greenwich Fair of that epoch, but the fair at Greenwich, as compared with that at Charlton, was

> As moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine.

Water, in truth, had very little to do with it; but if you would have seen Charlton Fair aright, you should have visited it by the pale moonlight (as Sir Walter says of Melrose), to see it in perfection. Then, if you got away from it without a broken head, you were lucky. Everybody was more or less drunk; to say, as is now the mode, that they had "exceeded in liquor," would give a very faint picture of the condition of most of the revellers; and, if any of them were not actually engaged in combat, it was because they were too far gone in drink. We believe it was a "royal" fair, and at all events possessed a patent that required an Act of Parliament to amend it. It lasted for many days and nights, and was looked upon by the wandering tribes of gipsies and showmen, and also by the river-

side population of the extreme East of London less as a carnival than a saturnalia. The law itself seemed to grant them an indulgence for anything committed at Charlton Fair; and they looked upon any infringement of its licence with much greater horror than they would have regarded the abolition of Magna Charta.

The care exercised by the military authorities of the time over its youthful students could scarcely be called paternal, but they did veto attendance at this fair in very distinct and stringent terms, not upon the ground of morality, but of discipline. Gentlemen-cadets were wont to return from that scene of amusement so very unlike officers and gentlemen in embryo, or even in the most distant perspective; so often, too, without divers of their accoutrements, and so unable to go through that test of sobriety, their "facings," that the place was taboo. And here let us state (lest it should be imagined, because we are describing a somewhat anarchical state of things, that we in any way sympathise with the same) that the authorities did their duty—sometimes—manfully enough. When they had made up their minds to stop any particular breach of discipline, they did stop it. The general administration of the Academy was mild to laxness;

but where it did draw a hard-and-fast line, it was like the stretched bowstring of an Eastern monarch — the gentleman-cadet that opposed himself to it was a gentleman-cadet no longer. The Cadet Company fully understood their position with regard to their rulers in this respect, and in a general way confined themselves to setting at defiance such enactments as were not thus indicated, as it were, by a red mark in their military regulations, and for more than five years they had abstained with exemplary obedience from attendance at Charlton Fair. But, unfortunately, on the present occasion, a circumstance had occurred which rendered further submission to the edict in question — so at least the committee of corporals and heads of rooms had decided—impossible. The immediate cause of revolution was (as often happens) contemptible enough. Two last-joined cadets — creatures themselves unworthy of attention except that they *were* cadets, and affiliated to the general body—in returning from the usual Saturday and Sunday "leave" in London, had taken it into their heads to pass a few hours of the Sabbath evening in the precincts of the fair. They were not, of course, in uniform, and in that circumstance lay Darall's only hope that the

vengeance of the corps would not be invoked upon their account; but it was known by the Fair people (with whom the memory of the tenants of the Military Academy and their misdoings was tolerably fresh) that they were cadets, and as such they had been without doubt most grievously ill-treated. Whether they had provoked their bad reception was a question that did not occur to the committee of corporals and heads of rooms. They were gentlemen-cadets of the Royal Military Academy, and their persons ought to have been held sacred, which had evidently not been the case. One of the young gentlemen had had his leg broken, and the other the bridge of his nose. The leg and the bridge might be repaired, but the wounded honour of the Cadet Company could not be healed by the surgeon's art.

"War, with its thousand battles and shaking a thousand thrones," was the decision that had been arrived at in solemn, but secret, conclave by the Cadet Committee. When afternoon parade should be over, on the day on which our story commences, it was enacted that in place of "breaking off," and giving themselves up to recreation, the Company should keep their ranks and march down upon

the offending myriads at the Fair. The cadet army was numerically small, counting in all perhaps one hundred and sixty, but then they had military discipline, and above all—though this was not specially mentioned — was not their cause a just one, and likely to be favoured of high heaven? It had been suggested by some fantastic spirits that Messrs. Bright and Jefferson should be taken out of hospital, in their damaged condition, and carried in front of the host, as the bodies of those revolutionists who had been shot by the soldiery were wont to be borne aloft by their avenging brethren; but this sensational suggestion had been overruled by Bex, who was a great disciplinarian, and even a martinet in his way, and could find no precedent in the annals of war for such a proceeding.

Throughout that morning a certain hushed solemnity, by no means characteristic of the Cadet Company, pervaded that martial corps, but otherwise none could have guessed its dread intentions. Senior under-officer Bex had somewhat of the air with which the Duke of Wellington is depicted, while conceiving those famous lines which will live in men's memories as long as most creations of our poets—the lines of Torres Vedras; with one hand in the breast of his

coatee, and the other upon his forehead, he paced the parade, revolving doubtless his plans of attack. It was only like Mr. Whymper's ill-luck —as he afterwards observed—that that conciliatory young gentleman should have misunderstood this attitude, and inquired, with much apparent concern, whether the great chieftain had a headache; "No, sir, but I will give you one," was the unexpected reply with which his proffered sympathy was met; and it is probable that that "inch of his life," which the tender mercies of the cruel proverbially leave to their victims, was only preserved to him because, in such a crisis, the cadet army could not afford to lose a recruit, even of the very smallest importance. The other old cadets maintained for the most part a careless demeanour, as befitted young warriors to whom fire and steel—or at least stones and bludgeons—were matters of no moment; though it is likely that under that indifferent air lurked some apprehensions, not, perhaps, of the coming strife, but of what their parents and guardians would be likely to say about it, when it should prove to have cost them their prospective commissions. Landon would have been in the highest spirits, having no fear of either event before his eyes, but for his solicitude upon his friend's account. Darall had "fallen in"

at the morning's parade, and gone "into Academy"—that is, to pursue his studies—like the rest; and now he had retired to his room, as Landon shrewdly suspected, to write a letter home explaining that circumstances over which he had no control might be the ruin of him. There was still time for him to put himself on the sick-list, but the opportunity of doing so, without exciting suspicion, was gone by. Cecil Landon would never have been a traitor to any cause; wild horses would not have torn the secret of the coming outbreak from him to the prejudice of his companions; yet his zeal for the honour of the Academy was not so overpowering as to outweigh discretion. If he had been in Darall's place—as he frankly confessed to that gentleman—he would have seen Bex and Company—so he styled the honourable corps—in a warmer place than even they were likely to find Charlton Fair, before he would have sacrificed his future prospects to them.

But, if he could not be termed public-spirited, he had a thought for his friends as well as himself—as indeed may be gathered from the fact of his popularity. Men—especially young ones—make great mistakes in choosing their favourites, but they never select a mere egotist. Landon was gravely concerned upon his friend's

account, being well aware of the hostages which in his case had been given to fortune, and the delight which his reckless nature would have otherwise felt in the approaching *émeute* was dashed by this solicitude.

When he saw Darall take his place with the rest in the dining-hall, he knew that his arguments had failed of their effects, and that his friend's lot was thrown into the common urn. In those ancient days it was the custom of the oldsters at dinner to behave like Jack Spratt and his wife in the nursery ballad : among them they "licked the platter clean," and then sent it down to the unfortunate "neuxes;" or, at least, the heads of each mess cut off for themselves such meat as was tempting, and left the fag-end of the feast for the tails. But to-day, since it was necessary that the whole Cadet Company should be in good condition and full of vigour, there was a more equal distribution of beef and mutton ; and at Darall's mess the "snookers" fared exceptionally well, for that gentleman eat next to nothing.

"Darall is off his feed ; I think he is in a funk," whispered Whymper to Trotter. An ungrateful remark enough, since he was reaping the advantage of his senior's abstinence in a slice of mutton that was neither skin nor bone.

"Rubbish!" was the contemptuous rejoinder. Conversation at the cadet mess was abrupt in those days, but generally to the point. "If you can't think better than that, confine yourself to eating."

In an hour afterwards the bugle sounded for general parade. After the minute inspection of the gentlemen-cadets' stocks, and belts, and boots —which was the chief feature of this ceremony— was over, the usual course was for the officer at command to address the Cadet Company in the soul-stirring words, "Stand at ease." "Break." And then everybody went about his pleasure, until the next bugle sounded for study. On the present occasion the words of command were spoken, but without their ordinary effect. When the officer walked away the "Company," instead of "breaking," closed up, and Senior under-officer Bex took command of it.

"Atten*shon*," was the counter-order he delivered; "Left turn," "Quick march;" and at that word the whole corps, in one long line of two files only—so that it resembled a caterpillar —wound out of the parade-ground, past the porter's lodge, and marched off across the common to Charlton Fair. The emotion of the officer on duty was considerable; but, perceiving the utter hopelessness of restraining one hundred

and sixty gentlemen-cadets with his single arm, or even both of them, he turned disconsolately into the library, wrote down a formal complaint for the inspection of old Pipeclay, and washed his hands of his young friends for the afternoon.

"Left, right, left, right, left, right;" the corps had never marched better to church upon a Sunday than it did upon its mutinous errand; and Generalissimo Bex—if he had flourished in these days, he would have been a prig of the first water—expressed himself highly gratified with their soldier-like regularity of behaviour.

Upon leaving the common, and getting into the high road, he formed his army "four deep," and gave them a word of command that does not appear in the drill-books, and had, indeed, rather the air of a battle-cry than of a military order: "Unbuckle belts." Gentlemen-cadets wore neither swords nor bayonets, but their belts had a large piece of metal in the centre with "Ubique" upon it (perhaps because they hit with it "in all directions"), and, when dexterously used, these were formidable weapons. In the hands of a novice it was apt to strike the wielder like a flail; but very few of the young gentlemen of those days were novices in the use of it; and not one who had chanced to have had any difficulty, however slight, with a policeman.

There were swarms of Fair people dotted about the lanes—costermongers, itinerant showmen, gipsies, and the like—but with these the advancing army were enjoined not to meddle; they reserved their belts and their "Ubiques" for the hive itself.

The Fair was held in a huge field to the right of the road; and when the Cadet Company turned into it, "at the double," but still maintaining their serried ranks, it presented an animating spectacle. The principal space between the booths was crowded with sight-seers, and the booths themselves offered the most varied attractions: "The only Living Mermaid from the South Seas," "The Greatest Professors in the Art of Pugilism now extant," "The Genuine and Original Learned Pig," and a whole tribe of North American Indians in paint and feathers, at that moment in the act of celebrating their national tomahawk dance. For an instant business and pleasure were alike suspended at the sight of our youthful warriors; and then "thwack, thwack," went the Ubique belts, and the denizens of the Fair became aware, to their cost, that vengeance had come upon them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SIEGE AND THE SACK.

It is but right to state that the majority of the besieged persons were fully conscious that they had provoked attack. Outrages and reprisals had, it is true, for many years passed as naturally as compliments in other places, between the Charlton Fair folks and the tenants of the Military Academy, but these had been intermitted for a considerable time, and the treatment the two young men had received at the hands of these roystering roughs would have been very savage and severe, even if it had been provoked. It was only by a gallant charge of their natural and hereditary enemies, the police, that their young lives had been preserved, although their limbs, as we know, had not been so fortunate.

The unarmed mob in the main thoroughfare broke and fled at the first charge; under

waggons and tent-ropes they scuttled to left and right, the boldest making for the hedges where the stakes grew, and the wiliest lying flat on their faces behind the pictures that fronted the caravans. The cry was not indeed "*Sauve qui peut!*" for it was, "Here are them scaly cadets!" but the effect was precisely the same as that which takes place in military surprises upon a larger scale; only it was more difficult to save oneself by running, on account of the youthful agility of the assailants, who laid about them also with a vigour beyond their years. It was no child's play on either side, for whenever a belt-plate came in contact with a man's skull it cut a hole in it; while, on the other hand, not a few of the roughs were armed with bludgeons, while the big sticks employed in the "Aunt Sally" game of those days (for that lady is of ancient lineage) and the heavy legs of the pea-and-thimble tables afforded weapons to others. The discipline of the invaders, however, carried everything before them; in a few minutes their enemies bit the dust and fled, and then came the "sacking."

The proprietors of the booths, and the itinerant gentry generally, had, up to this point, rather enjoyed the combat. They were

caterers of spectacle to others, and had very seldom the opportunity of judging of the merits of any performance of a public nature. Such of them as had had any hand in the ill-treatment of the two young gentlemen in hospital were naturally careful to conceal the fact, and affected a serenity of mind, as to what the invading forces might do next, which they were probably far from feeling; others, however, had no sting of conscience in this respect, and rather hailed the advent of the new arrivals, as likely to fill their places of amusement at a higher rate of admission than was customary.

They had reckoned without their host, and in very great ignorance, it may be added, of the character of their guests. In the first place sentinels were placed in every tent to prevent the egress of its inhabitants, and Generalissimo Bex, his staff, and the rest of his victorious warriors gave a grand "bespeak," among which were several features rare in theatrical experience, but especially this one—that every performance was commanded to be gratuitous. The audience, too, was hypercritical and very inquisitive. Not content (for example) with the war-dance of the North American Indians, and the war-whoop,

for the execution of which those noble savages have such a reputation in musical circles, they made them dance and whoop in even a more natural if less national manner; nor were they satisfied till the unhappy "braves" had stripped off their borrowed plumes, washed the paint from their still dirty faces, and confessed themselves to be natives of Tipperary. With the Learned Pig (whom they requested to spell Pipeclay and other words still more foreign to his usual vocabulary) they were graciously pleased to express satisfaction, and, in proof of it (much to his owner's disapproval) conferred upon him the glorious boon of liberty, by driving him out into the adjacent woods. The incomparable pugilists (supposed not without reason to have had a hand—or a fist—in the ill-treatment of the two neuxes) they compelled to fight without the gloves, and when one of them had been beaten till he resembled less a man than a jelly-fish, they thrashed the victor.

I am afraid they pulled the "only mermaid's" tail off, and derided the "fattest woman in the world" in a manner which even a court-martial would have pronounced unbecoming officers and gentlemen: but when places are "sacked" it is notorious that our very Bayards cease to be the pink of courtesy. Perhaps the greatest

attraction to the victorious army was, however, Richardson's booth, at that epoch the great representative of travelling melodrama. The performances "commanded" from its talented company were at once numerous and varied: they compelled those *artistes* who had passed their lives, if they had not been born, in the purple, delineating kings and seldom condescending to be archdukes, to exchange robes with clown and harlequin, and some very curious and noteworthy acting was the result. The attentions, too, of our gentlemen-cadets to the *corps de ballet* were what would be now designated, I suppose, as "marked with *empressement.*" Richardson's booth was in fact to that honourable corps what Capua was to another victorious army, and with the same consequences. While the young warriors indulged their taste for the drama and flirtation, the scattered forces of the enemy gathered together, and returned to the tented field in vastly-augmented numbers. Armed with pitchforks and hedge-stakes, with bludgeons and rakes, they burst into the enclosure, and drove in the sentinels, with the most terrible cries for blood and vengeance.

The besiegers in their turn became the besieged; and if the description should seem a joke, it is the fault of the describer, for the reality had

very little fun in it for either party. The bloodshed, if not the carnage, was something considerable.

Generalissimo Bex at once put himself at the head of a sallying-party, but, though performing prodigies of valour, was driven back to his wooden walls—the booth. For, though it was called a booth, Richardson's was built of wood, and afforded the only tenable military position in the fair. The proverb that proclaims there is nothing like leather, was proved fallacious in the combat between belts and bludgeons. The cadets found their natural weapons inefficacious against the cold steel of the pitchforks and those other arms of their adversaries, which, if not "of precision," made a hole wherever they hit. They fell back, therefore, upon the theatrical armoury, and waged the combat with every description of mediæval weapon. Halberds of beefeaters, spears of knights, cross-handled swords of crusaders, were all pressed into the service. One gentleman-cadet even donned a suit of armour belonging to Richard Cœur de Lion, and, with a mace in one hand and a ballet-dancer in the other, defied the howling throng from the platform of the stage. The whole scene resembled that at Front de Bœuf's Castle, where Brian de Bois Guilbert escapes from the rabble of besiegers

with the beautiful and accomplished Rebecca. Only there was no escape for his modern counterpart. Matters began to look very bad, indeed, for the corps of gentlemen-cadets. They fought like men, even like heroes, and there was not an abusive epithet—much less a blow—which they did not return with interest. It is notorious that the use of strong language greatly strengthens and exhilarates our military in the field of battle, and this auxiliary—of which they had a store which was practically inexhaustible—they did not spare. Yet, the battle was going against them very decidedly. A council of war was hastily called together in the green-room, an apartment of bare wood, resembling a large packing-case; and it was decided that there was now no hope but to cut their way through the enemy, by issuing from the back of the booth, a comparatively unbesieged quarter. It was thought that this might be effected if the movement was performed with rapidity. Their chief difficulty lay in their wounded, whom, of course, they could not leave to the tender mercies of the roughs, and many of whom had been put *hors de combat.* If they could march with the army, it was as much as they could do; they could act the part of combatants no longer.

And now we are to narrate an incident as touching and romantic as ever happened in regular warfare. It must be premised that, although the male performers of the great Richardson troupe had taken the conduct of the cadet army in some dudgeon, and had fled from the booth as soon as its siege began, the lady performers were by no means so inimical to the honourable corps, and had remained. They had slapped the young gentlemen's faces when flushed with victory, and inclined to be too demonstrative in their attentions; but now that they were discomfited and in danger, the hearts of these ladies warmed towards them: they were touched by their youth, their bravery —which seemed about to be so ill rewarded— and, perhaps, in some cases, by their good looks.

The damsel whom I have ventured to liken to Rebecca was very soft-hearted, yet had also an unusual amount of intelligence, and, in the midst of the hurly-burly, and while one of the many onsets of the besiegers upon the platform was in the act of being repulsed—which was done on each occasion with greater and greater difficulty—she inquired naïvely of her Brian de Bois Guilbert, "Why don't you show these scoundrels our muskets?"

"Muskets!" answered Landon, excitedly, for he it was who had for the nonce taken the trappings of the Templar, which he was now in the act of discarding as too cumbrous; "I saw no muskets. Where are they? They would be our salvation."

"They were in the wardrobe"—so this simple creature described the armoury—"with the rest of the properties."

"I never saw them!" cried Landon; "did you, Darall?"

Darall had come in from the fray with a broken head, to which the simple remedy of cold water was being applied by a fair creature in tights:

> "When pain and anguish wring the brow,
> A ministering angel thou,"

was his neat acknowledgment of her solicitude.

"Get along with you and your angels," answered she, unconscious of the quotation. "Don't you hear your friend speaking to you?"

"Yes, I hear him; I found the muskets and hid them," said Darall, coolly. "Things are bad enough as it is, without there being murder done."

"Yes, but it is becoming a question whether we or those scoundrels yonder are to be

murdered," observed Landon, hotly. "Come, where did you hide these things?"

"I shall not tell you," answered Darall, decisively. "You may say what you like, but you will thank me for it some day, since a single shot——"

"Why you young stoopid," interrupted Rebecca—she was his elder by about six months—"the guns ain't loaded; there is neither powder nor shot in the booth; you need only show the muskets to frighten the fellows."

The young lady had, doubtless, some experience of the effect of the exhibition of firearms upon a crowd, and at all events, in their desperate case, it was quite worth while to try the experiment. Every minute that the besieged now spent in their little fortress added to their list of wounded, while, on the other hand, the forces of the enemy increased in number and audacity. Their sole hope, except in flight, lay in their being rescued by their friends the military at Woolwich, who would have been glad enough to have done battle for them, had they been aware of their hard straits; but, unhappily, Charlton Fair was as "taboo" to Her Majesty's forces, and for the same excellent reasons, as it was to the cadets themselves, and not a uniform was to

be seen among the crowd without. A general sally was therefore at once determined on.

Acting upon Landon's suggestion, the dozen or so of muskets that served for Richardson's stage army were given out to the wounded, who had instructions to level them at the enemy, but by no means to pull trigger, lest their harmless character should be thereby disclosed; thus it was hoped that the prowess of those who were least able to defend themselves would be most respected. These formed the first line of battle, as the whole Cadet Company issued forth from the back of the booth, and the effect of their appearance even exceeded expectation. The crowd, who had rushed round to cut off their retreat, at once fell back before the threatening muzzles of the muskets, and not until the retiring force had cleared the enclosure and reached the lane, did they pluck up courage to fall upon the rear-guard, which was under the command of Landon himself. Then, indeed, that young gentleman had quite enough to do; the march of the main body was necessarily slow because of those who had been hurt, and were scarcely fit for marching; and this gave the crowd opportunity for "cutting out" expeditions, whereby a cadet or two would get torn away from his friends, and had to be

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rescued, if not by tooth and nail, by every other description of weapon. It was fortunate for the whole corps that in their brief hour of victory they had not neglected, in their pursuit of more ethereal delights, to fortify themselves with both food and liquor; the weather was hot, and fun and fighting had made great demands upon their strength, which, after all, was not quite that of full-grown men; and now, with the sense of something like defeat depressing them, it was hard to have to contest every inch of their way, under pain of being left behind in hands that would have shown no mercy.

They fought, however, like young tigers, and, thanks to Darall, who had as quick an eye for a weak point in their own array as Landon had for one in that of their adversaries, they emerged from the lane on to the high road without the loss of a man. At this point the pursuit was stayed, and their peril might be considered over.

"We may be in time for evening parade yet, if we push on," said Darall, consulting his watch.

The poor young fellow was thinking of the price they would have to pay for their fun, and rightly judged that their offence, great as it was, would be held much more serious should

they fail in so important a professional obligation as parade.

Even Generalissimo Bex—who was as good as expelled already, and knew it—recognised the necessity (for others) of getting home by seven o'clock, and gave quite an unprecedented word of command:

"Double — all you fellows that can—and the rest hobble!" At the same time he gave injunctions to the rear-guard that they should not desert the wounded—the ineffectualness of whose weapons had long been made apparent, and who would have fallen victims to the least onslaught of the enemy. It was bad enough for Darall—to whom every moment was of such consequence—to have to suit his pace to that of these poor cripples; but worse luck even than this awaited him. They had been left by the main body—whose position was now indicated only by a cloud of dust—about five minutes, when a shrill cry for help was heard proceeding from the road by which they had just come.

"Good heavens! we have left no fellows behind us, have we?" cried Landon; even his reckless spirit slightly dashed by the prospect of having to attempt a rescue in the face of such overwhelming odds.

"No," said Darall, who, with his friend, had stopped behind the rest to listen. "I counted them all myself."

"And yet it sounds like some young fellow being hacked about," replied the other. "It is not a man's voice, it is too thin."

"It is a girl's," said Darall, gravely. And, again, not one agonising cry, but two, struck on their ears, passionately appealing for aid.

"Those brutes are ill-treating some women," observed Landon; "they are always doing it. It is no earthly use our going back."

"I am afraid they are paying out those poor girls who helped us to the muskets and things," said Darall, his face growing suddenly pale with concentrated rage.

Landon uttered such a string of anathemas as would have done honour to a papal excommunication. "It is no use thinking about it," exclaimed he, impatiently, "let us get on."

"No, Landon, we must not leave them. Just listen to that!"

A cry of "Help, help!" and then of "Murder!" clove the blue air. At the sound of it both the young fellows turned and began to run swiftly back upon the road they had just traversed.

"Somebody's getting it, and someone else

will get this," cried Landon, his hand still grasping the mace of the Templar—no pasteboard property, as it happened, but a formidable weapon of hard wood. Darall had for weapon only a hedge-stake—the spoil of some fallen foe—but no knight who ever laid lance in rest among all King Arthur's court had a more chivalrous soul.

CHAPTER V.

KNIGHTS, LADIES, AND AN OGRE.

At the point of junction of the lane with the high road, the two cadets came suddenly upon a little knot of their late adversaries—composed of gipsies and roughs—in the middle of whom could just be discerned two summer bonnets. These gentry were so occupied in persecuting the owners of the same, that they did not perceive the presence of the new-comers till they were actually upon them, and the "one, two," of the mace and hedge-stake had been administered with crushing effect; then they broke and fled, imagining that nothing less than the whole Cadet Company were returning upon them. Behind them they left two young girls, their raiment torn and bedraggled, their bonnet-strings flying, and their whole appearance pitiable to an extreme degree; yet

in no way contemptible, for besides the not uninteresting fact that they were very pretty, there was a spirit in the looks of both, and a fire in those of one of them, that seemed to proclaim the scorn of higher caste as well as the indignation of insulted modesty.

One was taller and darker than the other, and while the same heightened colour glowed in each of their faces, the eyes of the former gleamed with passion, while those of the latter were filled with tears.

"Quick, quick, young ladies!" cried Darall; "come back with us, before these cowardly scoundrels muster courage to return."

The shorter and fairer of the two girls hung back a little at this offer of being run away with by two young gentlemen in uniform, but her companion seized her by the wrist, and began to hasten with her in the direction indicated.

It was not a moment too soon, for their late assailants had already discovered how small was the party that had attempted their rescue, and were pouring down the narrow lane with oaths and yells.

"If one could *kill* one of these howling beggars, maybe it would stop the rest," muttered Landon between his teeth, as he stood, with his mace sloped upon his shoulder, awaiting the

onset. Darall, with his pointed stake, stood behind him, to the full as dangerous an opponent, though his firm face showed no such passion.

"We must make a running fight of it, Landon; every moment of delay is a moment gained for the girls; but we must never be surrounded; strike sharp, and then take to your heels."

Even as he spoke the mob began to slacken speed. There were only two against them, it was true; but they looked very ugly customers, and those who had an eye to their personal safety—who formed the majority—had already reflected that it was better to let somebody else do the knocking down, and leave to themselves the easier and more grateful task of trampling on the prostrate bodies. A gipsy and a travelling tinker, however, each armed with a tent-pole, separated themselves from the rest, and charged the two cadets at full speed, while the rest of the rabble rout came on less furiously behind them. These men were of large build, and the poles were long and strong, so that it seemed they must carry all before them; and they would without doubt have carried—or transfixed—these two young gentlemen, had they remained to stand the shock. But one of the arts and sciences

taught at the Royal Military Academy, to its elder pupils, was that of parrying the bayonet. The poles went on, but not quite in the direction indicated, and on the skulls of those who were bearing them, as it were, into space, descended the weapons that had just averted them with crushing effect; the tinker stumbled on for a few paces, and then fell in a pool of his own blood; the gipsy went down like a stone.

Without stopping to make the least inquiry as to the result of this military operation, the two young gentlemen were off like a shot, and had placed twenty yards of road between them and their pursuers, ere the latter had recovered from their dismay. In front of them the two terrified girls were making what haste they could, but it was plain that running was not the strong point of at least one of them. The shorter of the two, overcome more by agitation and alarm than by fatigue, could only stagger feebly along; and it was merely a question of a few yards nearer to or farther from home that they would be overtaken by their tormentors, whom it was not likely, in that broad high-road, that their two gallant defenders could again even so much as delay.

"We're done!" exclaimed Darall, perceiving the situation at a glance; "that is," added he, with a gleam of hope, "unless that is Bex coming back to help us."

Beyond the two girls there suddenly came into view two or three figures, marching, or at least walking in line, from the direction of Woolwich.

"By jingo, they are gunners!" exclaimed Landon. "Hi, hi! to your guns, to your guns, guns, guns!" It was a war-cry well known to the artillerymen of those days in and about Woolwich; and known also to their foes. At the first note of it, the hurrying throng slackened speed, then stopped and stared, as if to make sure of the red and blue uniforms that were growing every moment more distinct; for the new-comers were now running. Then the mob turned tail, and fled tumultuously to their tents.

It was for the moment not quite certain that the two damsels thus preserved from Charybdis might not have fallen into Scylla, or in other words have exchanged the rudeness of the Fair-folk for the blandishments of the military, who, always gallant, are sometimes lacking in chivalry; but, as it happened, the two cadets hurried up only to find the young ladies in safe hands.

"Lor' bless yer," said one man to Landon, as if in apology for not having committed any misconduct, "the tall 'un is niece to our own colonel," a relationship doubtless at least as binding to him as any in the tables of affinity in the Book of Common Prayer. But for this recognition, it is my fixed belief that, in the wild and wicked times of which I write, the young ladies would have had to pay the ransom of a kiss or two. To the common eye they did not, in their dishevelled and agitated state, look very like young ladies; and one of them, the shorter, had not breath enough left, poor thing, to have said "Don't." The other, however, had recovered herself sufficiently to thank Landon and Darall with much warmth and gratitude, and to narrate in a few words what had befallen them. "I was out for a walk with my friend, Miss Ray—a daughter of the Commissary-General—and on our return home were met by that cowardly rabble, from whose hands you were so good as to deliver us. My uncle, Colonel Juxon, will, I am sure, take the first opportunity of expressing to you, much better than I can do, his sense of the service you have rendered us."

She addressed these words to Darall, not

because he looked like the elder of the two cadets, for he did not, but because Landon's gaze was fixed so earnestly upon her as to cause her some embarrassment. The fact was the young fellow could not keep his eyes off that dark-hued but lovely face, with its grand eyes and grateful smile; his heart, always susceptible to beauty, was aflame, and his ready tongue experienced for once a difficulty in expression. It was nevertheless necessary for him to speak, since it was certain Darall could not. To say that that young gentleman, when in the presence of the softer sex, was more shy than any young miss at her first dinner-party, would fall very short indeed of describing his modesty. His face had softened so during the last few moments that you would have scarcely recognised it as the same which had been set so steadily against his enemies; the hand that had just used the hedge-stake so effectively shook with nervous terrors; in short, he looked as thoroughly "upset" and disorganised as Miss Ray herself.

"I am sure," stammered Landon, "that my friend and I are more than rewarded, for any little assistance we may have rendered you, Miss Juxon——"

"Not Miss Juxon," interrupted the young lady with rapid earnestness; "my name is Mayne." Then perceiving that he was in difficulties with his little speech—as well he might be—she took it up for him. "As for what you are pleased to call a little assistance, it was an act of great courage against overpowering odds, and I shall never forget it—never."

"Well, the fact is, Miss Mayne," answered Landon, the "cupidon" lips showing his white teeth—his smile was his best property, and few could withstand it—"we owed you the rescue; for if it had not been that we cadets had just been robbing their nest, those wasps yonder—and I compliment the scoundrels by such a metaphor—would not perhaps have annoyed you. We had just given them a good thrashing"—this was scarcely true, but the military, when describing their own achievements, are allowed some licence—"and I suppose it struck them, on their retreat, that it would be very pleasant to annoy those who could not defend themselves."

"We found defenders—brave ones," answered the young lady, softly; and then she once more added: "I shall never, never forget it"—only instead of "it," she said "you."

The two were now walking together, side by side, towards Woolwich, while behind them came Darall and Miss Ray—whom a common shyness had at least placed on the same plane, and who were getting on, in the monosyllabic fashion, tolerably well. The ladies were now quite safe from any possible annoyance, but still it was very embarrassing for them to be walking on the high-road in rags and tatters —for the mob had sadly spoilt their summer finery—in company with two gentlemen-cadets, however gentlemanlike. It was therefore with great joy that they found themselves presently overtaken by a return fly from Greenwich, which was at once secured for them by Landon.

"I think, Darall, you had better go off to 'the Shop,'" he said confidentially; "the sooner you get there the better, though I don't doubt that the service you have performed for these ladies, being who they are, will cover a multitude of sins. One of us, of course, must see them home."

The advice was doubtless good, and certainly unselfish, for the effect of it was necessarily to leave Landon with one young lady too many; and yet his friend did not seem so grateful for it as he ought to have been. Conscious of his own bashfulness, perhaps, he

regretted having to quit Miss Ray's company, with whom he had by this time managed to "get on" tolerably well; and that barren ground he knew would have to be gone over again when they next met, for it was almost as difficult for young gentlemen of his character to resume the thread of an acquaintance as to find it in the first instance. However, he had not yet arrived at that point of courtship at which we are enjoined to leave father and mother, to cleave to a young person of the opposite sex; and the thought of his parent, and her dependence upon him, sent him off at once.

"You will call on papa, if papa does not call on you," said Miss Ray, softly; from which remark we are not to imagine that that damsel was "forward," but that she had some well-grounded apprehensions of her father's being backward in performing any act of courtesy. He was not the Commissary-General, though Miss Mayne had called him so, being only the Acting-Deputy-Assistant-Commissary-General; but he had all the Jack-in-office peculiarities of the most full-blown official.

Once in the fly, both young ladies at once recovered their self-possession. Fortunately the vehicle was a closed one, so that their dilapi-

dated condition could not be observed as they drove along, and to Landon they had appeared under so much more disadvantageous circumstances, that his presence did not embarrass them. They laughed and chattered quite unreservedly.

"What a kind, courageous creature is that friend of yours, Mr. Landon," said Miss Mayne.

"Yes, indeed, he is," echoed Miss Ray, admiringly.

Sometimes it is not pleasant to hear young ladies praise one's friend, but on this occasion Landon saw nothing to object to in it, for what Darall had done he had also done; and somehow it struck him that the term "creature" would not have been used—in however complimentary a sense—had the speaker made mention of himself.

"Mr. Darall is all very well" (she seemed to say), "but it is clear you are the master mind."

To do him justice, however, Landon was not slow to sing his friend's praises, and, with the frankness of youth, proceeded to give a sketch of his position, and how his future prospects were likely to be imperilled by the escapade of that afternoon.

"I have sent him off to make the best

excuse for himself he can—and I am sure he has a good one—for not having returned with the other sinners."

"But what will *you* do?" exclaimed Miss Mayne, with an anxiety that the young fellow flattered himself had also a touch of tenderness in it; "why should you run any needless risk by accompanying us, now that we are quite safe?"

"Oh, my case is different," laughed Landon, carelessly. "It would not break my heart if I were to be sent away from the Academy to-morrow; whereas, it *would* break it, you know," he added roguishly, "to think that, after such a terrible adventure as you have experienced, you should be suffered to return home alone."

"But you have a mother also, perhaps?" suggested Miss Ray.

"Unfortunately I have not," said Landon; and while Miss Ray said "Oh dear!" commiseratingly, and Miss Mayne's fine eyes looked two large volumes of tender sympathy, he added gaily: "and as for the governor, I think he would be rather pleased than otherwise to find that I had stepped out of my uniform, and was prepared to help him to make money in his City counting-house."

"It must be very charming to be rich," sighed Miss Ray.

"If you are not so," answered Landon, with a little bow, "you prove that it is possible to be very charming, and yet not to be rich."

Miss Mayne broke into a musical laugh, and only laughed the more when her friend, suffused with blushes, told her that she ought to be ashamed of herself for laughing, and thereby giving encouragement to Mr. Landon's audacity.

They had altogether a very pleasant drive; and when Miss Ray was dropped at her father's residence, which was "Letter Z, Officers' Quarters," and did not present an attractive exterior, the two that were left behind enjoyed it perhaps even more.

Colonel Juxon, R.A., lived a little way out of Woolwich, in that now well-known suburb called Nightingale Vale, and the address, we may be sure, afforded Landon an opportunity of paying a well-turned compliment. At the period of which we write, this locality was only sparsely sprinkled with villa residences, inhabited mostly by the families of officers of high rank, or whose private means admitted of their living out of barracks. Hawthorne

Lodge, which was the Colonel's house, was a really pretty little tenement, standing in a garden of its own, and having in its rear that unmistakable sign of prosperity, a coach-house. As they drove up the neatly-gravelled drive in front of the cottage, covered with its flowering creepers, and offering a view of a very elegant "interior" through the open French windows of the drawing-room, Landon expressed his admiration. "Why, I did not know Woolwich could boast of such a bower, Miss Mayne; your home looks like Fairyland."

"Yes, it is certainly pretty for Woolwich," answered the young lady; "and it also resembles Fairyland in one particular, that it is inhabited by a wicked enchanter."

"I know about the enchanter, but I did not know she was wicked," answered Landon.

"I did not mean myself, sir, as you very well knew," returned she, reprovingly; "I was referring to my uncle, Colonel Juxon—a gentleman rather formidable to folks who don't know him; in the army he is called a fire-eater, I believe; but at home——"

"Who, in the fiend's name, my dear Ella, have you brought here?" inquired a sharp, thin, testy voice, as the fly drew up at the door, and a short, spare old gentleman in undress

uniform presented himself at it. His hair and moustache were as white as snow, and made by contrast a pair of copper-coloured and blood-shot eyes look yet more fiery; altogether he had the appearance of a ferret, and also of a ferret who was exceedingly out of temper.

"This is Mr. Cecil Landon, uncle, to whom Gracie Ray and I have just been indebted for the greatest possible service."

"The devil you have!" said the Colonel, sardonically.

"Yes, uncle; Gracie and I were returning quietly home, after a walk along the Greenwich Road——"

"A deuced bad road to choose for a walk," interrupted the Colonel, angrily; "the most deuced bad road."

"So indeed it turned out, uncle," continued the young girl, in unruffled tones, "for a lot of drunken people from Charlton Fair——"

"Aye, cadets, I suppose; I've heard of their doings," interrupted the Colonel, regarding Landon with great disfavour; "there's going to be a clean sweep made of them by Sir Hercules this time, however."

"But it was not the cadets, uncle; on the contrary, it was to the cadets, or at least to two of them, one of whom was this gentle-

man here, that Gracie and I are indebted for escaping perhaps with our lives."

"Pooh, pooh, what did they want with your lives?" returned the Colonel, contemptuously. "The dashed vagabonds wanted to kiss you, and by the look of your bonnet they must have done it. By the living Jingo! if I had only caught them at it, I'd have set a mark on one or two that would have taken a deal of rubbing to get it off again."

"That is exactly what, in our humble, and doubtless less effectual way, we did," explained Landon, deferentially.

"Then you had no business to do anything of the sort," thundered the Colonel; "things are come to a pretty pass if a dashed cadet is to take matters into his own hand as though—dash his impudence!—he were an officer of the staff."

"What course then would you have recommended us to pursue?" inquired Landon, with a twinkle of the eye which betrayed that his respectful air was not altogether genuine and might have even aroused a suspicion, in an ill-regulated mind, that a cadet might chaff a colonel.

"Well, sir," said that officer, suddenly assuming a deadly calmness of demeanour,

"I would have ventured to recommend you then, what I recommend now—namely, to go to the devil; and if ever I catch you, or any young vagabond like you, on my premises again, I'll send you there."

"Uncle, I won't have it," exclaimed the young girl, with sudden vehemence; "you are behaving with great injustice and base ingratitude"—it was curious to see the family likeness of tone and manner that came out as she thus expressed herself. "This gentleman——"

"Gentleman-cadet, you mean, my dear," interposed her uncle, spitefully; "that's quite a different thing."

"I daresay it was so when you were at the Shop," said Landon, coolly; "but that must have been a long time ago."

The little Colonel gave a screech, and snatched at a riding-whip that hung above him on the wall of the little entrance-hall.

"If you strike him, I leave your house," exclaimed the young girl, throwing herself between them.

"You'll leave it with him, perhaps," cried the old gentleman, pointing to Landon with the whip, as he stood with folded arms upon the doorstep; "a penniless beggar of a cadet!"

"I blush for you, sir, as I never thought

to blush for any of my kin," answered the girl, haughtily.

"You had better keep a blush or two for yourself, Miss Ella," rejoined the old gentleman; but bitter as were his words, he laid the whip aside as he spoke them, and there was a manifest lull in the tempest of his wrath. "What is it he wants? What the devil have you brought him here for?" continued he, fretfully; "you don't know what these cadets are, Ella."

"I only know, sir, that this cadet has done me a great service. I brought him here —since you put it so—that he might receive the thanks of my uncle and guardian. Instead of which you have treated him—yes—in a manner very unbecoming an officer and a gentleman."

"No, no, no," replied the old fellow, in ludicrous expostulation, "nobody can ever say that of Gerald Juxon; though I may have been a little warm, may I be tried by court-martial if I ever treated man or woman that way. I am sure I am very glad to see Mr. What's-his-name at Hawthorne Lodge, just once and away; and I beg to thank him—yes, sir, I beg to thank you, if you have done my niece good service, and I shall take dashed

good care that you are not put to any inconvenience upon her account again."

Landon, with a good-natured smile, bowed his thanks for this handsome acknowledgment. The character of Colonel Gerald Juxon was not unknown to him, though he had never before had the privilege of his personal acquaintance. A "smart" Artillery officer, and one who had served with no little distinction in the field, the Colonel was yet shunned by the more respectable members of the regiment, for his fiendish temper and reckless tongue. He had served, he was wont to say, "all the world over;" so that he must have served in Flanders, to which therefore may be attributed his inveterate use of bad language. Even in ladies' society, including that of his niece, of whom he was genuinely fond, he was unable wholly to divest himself of this bad habit. His nature was also said by some to be grasping, but this was denied by others; and certainly since Ella had come to reside with him—for whose accommodation he had left his barrack quarters and taken Hawthorne Lodge—this idiosyncrasy was not apparent. The fact was, though greedy after gain, he was lavish rather than otherwise with what he had, and especially lavish with the

property of others. His private income was considerable, and that of his niece still larger, though neither of these resources would have sufficed him if he had been fined every time he was committed for the offence known as "profane swearing."

Even now the Colonel was solacing himself for his extorted civility to his visitor by a volley of expletives against gentlemen-cadets in general, and Gentleman-cadet Landon in particular; and for the very purpose of discharging it, he had left the hall and entered his little drawing-room—a striking example of the ill effects of "temper," for thereby he had given the young people an opportunity, which he would willingly have denied them, of speaking together alone.

"You must not mind what my uncle says," whispered Ella, hastily; "you will not be deterred by his rough ways from—from—letting me know how matters fare with you, and with your friend, of course. We shall be so anxious—Gracie and I—to hear about it; so apprehensive lest harm should happen to either of you through our misfortune."

"Don't think of that, Miss Mayne. But Darall, I am sure, would wish to pay his respects. Would ten o'clock to-morrow morning——?"

Ella nodded in acquiescence, at the same time lifting a warning finger, as her uncle hurried back into the hall.

"What in the name of all the devils is he waiting for?" inquired he, in what might have been meant, perhaps, as a confidential whisper to his niece, but which was distinctly audible to the subject of his inquiry. "Hi, sir! would you like a glass of wine? champagne, or anything you please? only you had better look sharp and be off home; Sir Hercules is not in a state of mind to be trifled with, I promise you."

Landon declined the wine and took his leave, with a clinging grasp of his young hostess's shapely hand, which she frankly held out to him.

The decision which Sir Hercules might come to as to his delinquencies, and their punishment—always a very secondary consideration with him—had by this time sunk into total insignificance beside the smile of Ella Mayne.

CHAPTER VI.

A SPARRING MATCH.

Colonel Gerald Juxon and his niece both remained in the porch of their pretty cottage, while Landon walked down the drive and out of the gate; the Colonel because he deemed it expedient to see "that fellow" off the premises with his own eyes; the lady because she wished to see the last of that gallant and very good-looking young knight, who had fought, and might have fallen, or at least come to very serious grief, for her sake. He turned at the last moment and raised his cap; the Colonel mechanically replied to the salute with his forefinger; the young lady bowed and waved her hand, but by no means mechanically.

"Well, upon my soul!" cried the Colonel, throwing up his open palms. It was for him

a very slight expression of astonishment and annoyance, and when excited he generally doubled his fists.

"What's the matter, Uncle Gerald?" inquired his niece, coolly.

"Matter, begad? Well, I think it matter enough when a young woman of two-and-twenty goes and throws herself at the head of a penniless scamp like that——"

"How do you know Mr. Landon is a scamp, uncle?" inquired Ella, in a tone rather of amusement than indignation.

It is Coleridge, I think, who says that no one can have a faith to be called firm, who cannot afford to laugh at it himself; and this was Ella's case. She felt in her heart of hearts that Landon was no scamp.

"How do I know it? Why, because everybody knows every cadet is a scamp. As to means and marriage, they may have their hands to offer; but there is never a coin in them to pay the parson for performing the service."

"Still they have their honour, and their good swords," observed Ella, gravely.

"Their honour!" shrieked the little Colonel; "ye gods, think of a cadet's honour! and as to their swords, they don't happen to wear them."

Ella broke into a long, musical laugh, which seemed to disconcert her uncle extremely.

"I know, my dear girl," said he, in what was for him a tone of conciliation, "that you are as obstinate as the gout in one's heel, but it is quite useless even for you to set your heart upon that young vagabond. You might just as well fall in love with a drummer-boy—you might, indeed!"

"Well, and why not, uncle? Then I could be a *vivandière* to the regiment."

"That would be a dashed pretty thing," answered the other, scornfully.

"Well, I think I *should* look rather pretty in uniform," said Ella, with an air of reflection. "With a cap with a gold band, and a charming little keg of spirits, instead of a sabretache. Then, if Mr. Landon was wounded —as he would be sure to be in the first engagement, for he is as brave as a lion—I would give him a little glass of brandy, so;" and she turned her little hand bewitchingly in the air, in illustration of this piece of ambulance practice.

"It is deuced hard to be angry with you, Ella," ejaculated the Colonel; "but this is a serious matter. You have given such en-

couragement to this young cat-a-mountain, that I will lay five to one his conceit will lead him to come back again."

"I would lay ten to one, uncle," replied the young lady, coolly, "that his good feeling will cause him to do so—ten pairs of gloves to one odd one, that Mr. Landon will come back. I intend him to do so. I mean to see him when he does come."

"The devil you do! Then I'll keep a dog warranted to fly at beggars."

"Mr. Landon is not a beggar, nor a poor man at all, uncle," answered the girl, steadily. "It would make no difference to me if he has not a penny, but, as a matter of fact, he is the only son of a rich merchant; for he told me so himself."

"I should like to have some better authority for that fact than his bare word," answered the Colonel, contemptuously. "However," added he, more gravely, "if you are fixed upon this folly, I will make inquiries. You are resolved, I suppose, to behave as your own mistress in this, as in other matters?"

"Most certainly I am," returned the young lady, coolly. They had passed into the drawing-room by this time; Ella was sitting on a low chair, with her torn bonnet upon her

knees, and her splendid hair falling in dark masses about her shoulders; the Colonel was pacing the room with measured strides, that seemed to ill accord with the vehemence and irregularity of his talk.

"Of course, the whole thing may come to nothing, Ella; you can't compel this young —gentleman—to make you an offer; for that is what I suppose you are driving at."

Here he stopped, for she had suddenly risen and confronted him with a burning face.

"Look you, uncle," said she, "there are some things I will not put up with even from you. The facts of the case are these: this gentleman, as he truly is, whatever you may choose to call him, has done me to-day, for nothing, as great a service as I have ever experienced from anyone for value received. The only payment he has got is a string of insults from the man whose duty it was to thank him for his generous behaviour. It angered me to see him so treated, as it would have done had he been as old as yourself, and as ill-favoured; and I strove to undo the effect of your discourtesy. That is all."

"Well, well, it may be so, Ella," replied the Colonel, his wrath appearing to pale before

her own like a fire under the rays of the sun; "but I know a girl's heart is as tinder to flint when any chance service is done her by any good-looking young fellow; and I wished to put a stop to what I thought, and still think, to be a dashed imprudent thing. You have thanked the lad, and there's an end; but, of course, if you think proper more should come of it——"

"You are cruel and unkind, uncle," interrupted the girl, with vehemence. "Your words are unjust and unjustifiable, and you know it, and I know why you use them. Yes, since you are so hard, I will be hard, too; you want to keep me and my money all to yourself. You have grudged my making any friend, except Gracie, beyond these doors, for fear I should be enticed away from you; and this conduct of yours is all of a piece with the rest of it."

Strange as a likeness would seem between a tall, finely-shaped girl, as dark as a gipsy, with a gray and withered anatomy of a man, it could be seen now, as she stood face to face with her uncle, her eyes flashing, and one little foot fiercely beating the floor. The Colonel fairly exploded in a sort of "bouquet" of fiery imprecations ere he found articulate speech.

"You ungrateful minx!" cried he, "is this the reward I get for making my house your home? When you left your father's house in disgrace, I knew it was useless to expect dutifulness, but I did look for some gratitude, girl!"

"And you found it, uncle," answered she, coolly. "I assure you there was that item in addition to the four hundred pounds a year that I agreed to pay you for my maintenance. I am obliged to you for the shelter you have afforded me, but the price I pay for it is sufficient. I will not put up with insulting insinuations such as you have just thought fit to indulge in. I had rather leave Hawthorne Lodge, and take up my quarters with Gracie, whose mother, I know, would give me welcome."

It was a very remarkable and, indeed, unparalleled circumstance that, notwithstanding the argument was still hot, and the Colonel undoubtedly still angry, he here forbore to indulge in very strong language.

"I can't think you will be such a born fool as that, Ella," said he, quietly. "To separate yourself from the only relative, save one, you possess in the world would, in your position, be madness. You would find the Commissary's

quarters a bad exchange for Hawthorne Lodge, I reckon."

"They would be found capable of improvement, I have no doubt," answered Ella, coolly. "However, as you have stated with such candour, it is not my interest to quarrel with you; and, indeed, uncle, I have no intention of doing anything of the sort. I think I have shown that since we have lived together. You have a temper like the rest of our family, and I make every allowance for it. And now, with your permission, I will retire to take off these rags and dress for dinner."

She withdrew with a sweeping curtsy, which would have shown offended pride, but for the good-natured nod of the head which accompanied it.

"Did you ever see such an abominably impudent minx?" inquired the Colonel, addressing her vacant chair. "Is such conduct credible in a Christian country?"

As the chair was an ordinary chair, and not a spirit-medium—as that article of furniture sometimes is—it did not so much as lift a foot in reply.

In the absence of its negative testimony, the Colonel was compelled to believe the

evidence of his own eyes, which he proceeded to objurgate accordingly. Then, pulling out his watch: "It wants an hour yet to dinner," said he, "so I'll just step down to the Commissary's, and ask him what he thinks about it."

CHAPTER VII.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

Acting-Deputy-Assistant-Commissary-General Ray occupied apartments in barracks, which were not more numerous and much less magnificent than his titles. They were shabbily furnished, and the furniture, even in its best days, had not been good. The look-out of the principal rooms was upon the dusty barrack square; and the quiet of home-life was apt to be disturbed by the sudden roll of drums, the unexpected squeak of fifes, and, occasionally, by the quarrels of the soldiers at the canteen. The seamy side of military life was, in short, always presented to the inmates of this establishment; they lived, as it were, inside the Punch's show. Fortunately—since their quarters were so limited—the family was small; consisting only of

the Commissary, his wife—a confirmed invalid, whom creeping paralysis at present permitted to move herself about in a patent wheel-chair, but to whom even that limited freedom of movement was soon to be denied—and their daughter, Grace, whose acquaintance we have already made.

The trio exhibited a marked contrast to one another. The head of the house was a tall, muscular Scotchman, of about sixty years of age, who bore his years, not, indeed, "lightly —like a flower"—but with that comparative convenience which comes of a strong digestion and absence of fine feelings. He had been a good deal knocked about in his time, but he was harder than the things, or people, that had hit him; he boasted, indeed, of being as "hard as nails," imagining that to be, in a man, a moral excellence, which, in the rhinoceros, he would have only admitted to be an accident of birth. He had at no time of his life been young; that is, he had neither felt himself to be so, nor looked like it; and hence he reaped the great advantage of not perceiving any particular change in himself, nor having it observed by others, now he was old. Everybody who saw him now, and had known him in past days, re-

marked that Sandy Ray looked much the same. In the cold of Canada he had not shivered; in the heat of the West Indies he had not perspired; but had defied all climates and all weathers. He had never given way to a folly or a weakness; never experienced the temptation of an impulse of any sort; and hence, upon a very small stock of intelligence, had acquired the reputation of a long-headed fellow. He was also reputed to be wealthy, notwithstanding—or, perhaps, in consequence of—the poverty of his domestic *ménage*. He had held various semi-military appointments all over the world; and though the "pickings" contingent to such positions are not large, there *are* pickings, and Sandy Ray was supposed to have swept them all up into a very close-meshed net. His christian-name was Alexander, but no one had ever abbreviated that; he was not a man to have his name shortened through affection or familiarity; he was called Sandy from the tint of his hair, whereon the red bristles still contended with the gray for every inch of pate. His features were large and inexpressive except of hardness; his gray eyes cold and slow of movement; his teeth white and strong as a wolf's. He spoke with an elaborate

caution, which was never so marked as when in conversation with his *fidus Achates*, Colonel Juxon; whose words flowed like a torrent set with crags and rocks, and creamed with imprecations in place of foam.

What bond of union existed between these two men, in most respects so different, it was hard to tell. They had both of them "frugal minds," and it was by some suggested they had investments in common; others, however, of a livelier fancy, did not hesitate to express either conviction that "Swearing Juxon" and "Sandy Ray," who it was notorious had known one another years ago in outlandish quarters, shared the knowledge of some secret crime between them which had probably filled both their pockets.

What was a much greater mystery than how the Commissary had secured the Colonel's friendship, was, how he had won his wife. She must have been, when he married her, a beautiful girl; indeed, the remnants of great beauty still lingered about her feeble and shattered frame, and "what could she ever have seen in her husband?" was the inquiry every woman put to herself when she saw the pair together. That Mrs. Ray had not married Sandy for his beauty was certain,

from the evidence of his contemporaries; nor was it for his mental or moral attractions, because he had none; nor was it for money, since whatever private store he might now possess, he had certainly not acquired in those days; it remained, therefore, since all reasonable causes were thus eliminated, that she had married him for love, which was the most extraordinary explanation of all.

It is my private belief that the unhappy lady, being of a nervous and submissive nature, had been positively frightened into wedding him, by which means, perhaps, more marriages are to be accounted for than is generally supposed. However, she *was* married to him, and was being only slowly relieved from that position by the disease which I have mentioned. Her husband was not specially unkind to her, but of gentleness he had not a grain in his composition, and the lack of it—though the doctors did not say so—had helped to bring her to her present pass. He had, it is probable, been proud of her in his way, at one time; had doubtless smiled grimly when it had come to his ears that people said, "What could she have seen in him?" But now he was only proud of the chair in which she sat. It had cost him, being a patent article, a considerable

figure; and when folks said (for there are folks who will say anything) that his wife's affliction must be a great trial to him, he would reply, "and not only a trial, but, let me tell you, a matter of very considerable expense." Then he would point out the advantages of the chair, with her in it; indeed she was made to put it through its paces, as it were, moving it hither and thither with a touch of her thin hand; and if a compliment were not paid him —though he professed to despise compliments— upon the consideration for her comfort that had caused him to invest in so expensive an article, he was more bearish than usual for the rest of the day.

What thoughts passed through poor Mrs. Ray's mind as she sat, dying so slowly, in that delicate and costly piece of furniture, are too sad for me to imagine. She was not what is called "a great thinker," so let us hope things were better with her than would have been with some who are; but sometimes in that worn and weary face could be read terrible things; across those still tender eyes flitted, I fear, the ghosts of youth and health, the piteous remembrance of long-vanished joys. She had no very earnest religious feelings, and was therefore without that hope which

sustains so many unfortunates in this inexplicable world; of life the poor soul had had enough; the best that she looked forward to was eternal rest. Yet no word of complaint escaped her. How strange it is that the fate of martyrs, who do not happen to be saints, should attract so little pity!

Gracie, indeed, was sorry for her mother; but with that exception, no one seemed to consider her case a hard one. Perhaps, if she had mentioned how hard she felt it, people might have agreed with her, but as it was, they saw her pale face lit with its sad smile, and expressed their approval of her resignation. She had not much liking for books, but was never idle, working with her needle a little for herself and a great deal for Gracie. Perhaps the most pressing sorrow she had was the reflection that there would soon come a time when she should still be alive, and yet unable to work; when the palsy that at present had only reached her lower limbs should attack her diligent fingers. Then, indeed, it would be melancholy to sit at that barrack window, with folded hands, awaiting death's tardy stroke. The cares of managing the little household upon the scanty sum that her husband allowed for its maintenance, were, it

was true, delegated to Gracie; but she shared the responsibility with her, and took all the blame—and there was often blame—upon her own shoulders. The Commissary, who grudged every shilling, however necessarily spent, preferred to find fault with his wife instead of his daughter, because it made the latter cry. Not that he would have been rendered the least uncomfortable by any amount of woman's tears, but because the crying made Gracie's eyes red, and deteriorated from her personal appearance; and her beauty was precious to him, as likely to prove a marketable commodity. Thus the girl escaped a good many jobations, which she did not indeed deserve any more than her mother, but which she would have gladly borne in her mother's place. The invalid, on the contrary, was well satisfied that any consideration, no matter what, should preserve her beloved daughter from the Commissary's ire.

Imagine, therefore, her distress of mind when Gracie made her appearance out of the fly upon that day of the battle of Charlton Fair, with draggled raiment and torn bonnet. In this case Mrs. Ray felt that the dear child must bear her own burden of reproach and fault-finding. And heavy enough she knew

it would be; for Gracie had worn her best attire upon the occasion of that unlucky walk with Eila Mayne, and it would take many shillings to repair its damages.

"My dear child," cried she, as soon as she had assured herself that she had received no personal hurt, "what will your father say? It was only last week that he paid three pounds on account to Miss Furbelow."

Her head shook from side to side with nervous agitation; it was terrible to see such affliction, about so insignificant a matter, in one so stricken.

"But, dear mamma, papa will understand that it could not be helped. If it had not been for Mr.—that is, for two young gentlemen from the College—matters might have been much worse."

Mrs. Ray gave a little sigh. She had applied that argument—or had had it applied for her—of comparative degrees of evil, much too often to derive comfort from it. Another philosophic remark, that "when things are at their worst they must needs mend," was also inefficacious in her case. Perhaps it was because her powers of perception were dull.

"Change your dress as soon as you can, Gracie dear, and then tell me all about it.

If your papa comes in and sees you in such a state, oh dear! oh dear! oh dear!" and again she wrung her hands. There was a similitude in the poor lady's speech and action to those of Mr. Punch, when in dread expectation of the policeman, but "the pity of it" prevented the smile that they would have otherwise provoked. Her policeman was a reality, and she, alas! had no stick wherewith to knock him over the head, to the enjoyment of all beholders.

When Gracie, however, presently reappeared in a dress less splendid indeed than that which had met with such mischance, but very neat and becoming, it was plain that there was some happiness for the invalid yet. Her daughter looked so blooming that she persuaded herself "dear Alexander" would not "have the heart" to scold her; and having laid that flattering unction to her soul, she was at liberty to take pride and pleasure in the girl's beauty. In telling her story, Gracie had this difficulty; she had to be careful not to alarm her mother by the account of her own peril, and at the same time not to underrate the services of Mr. Darall, who seemed to her a Paladin. Mrs. Ray listened to his exploits with the attention that the crippled always

pay to the recital of any physical conflict. "He must be a very brave and kind-hearted young man, that Mr. Darall," said she, when it was concluded, "and his friend also."

"Yes, mamma, he was most kind. It was not his fault that he didn't see us home, as the other did; but it appears that he runs great risk of getting into trouble for having been at the Fair at all."

"But does not his friend run the same risk?"

"Well, no; or, at least, if he did, it does not signify, because he is very rich; if he were sent away from the Academy to-morrow it would make no difference to his prospects, it seems, while poor Mr. Darall is—poor."

Mrs. Ray sighed again: perhaps she had permitted herself to entertain the "low beginnings" of a romance for Gracie, and now they were ruthlessly trodden down. Gracie understood the sigh quite well; there was no concealment in that household as regarded such matters. She had been told a dozen times by her father that her future prospects in life were in her own hands; that is, that they lay in her making a good marriage; and they had been discussed without reserve. She was no flirt, nor even what is called

"forward," either in ideas or behaviour; yet, perhaps, no man had ever paid her any marked attention without her having reflected to herself: "Perhaps this person will be my husband." It was not her fault that it was so; extreme delicacy of mind was as impossible to one in her circumstances, as modesty is to the offspring of some agricultural labourer, who has but one room for the accommodation of his grown-up family. What was possible to her of good the girl had acquired or retained; she possessed all its solidities, if circumstances had denied to her those graces which embellish goodness. A dissenting chapel may not have the external attractions of a cathedral, simply from want of funds, and yet be equally sacred. Up to that time, for example, Gracie had regarded the marriage question from a point of view that was, for one of her years and sex, somewhat calculating and matter-of-fact. It was, unhappily, no longer possible for her to do so, now that she had seen Hugh Darall.

For the future something would have to be given up as well as acquired; and that something, for the present, seemed immeasurably precious, not willingly to be bartered for much gold.

"What is he like — this Mr. Darall —

Gracie?" continued the invalid, with gentle sadness, but with a touch of curiosity too. Even when a pretty thing is not to be got, one likes to hear all about it.

"Oh, so handsome, dear mamma, and so kind, and, I am sure, so good!"

Mrs. Ray's pale lips twitched with a painful smile—an accident of her infirmity, perhaps; or was she thinking of some far-back time, when she had given someone credit for being "good" upon too short an acquaintance?

"That does not give one a very distinct idea of him, Gracie. Is he dark or fair?"

"Oh, fair, mamma. He has blue eyes?"

"Like Captain Walters?" inquired the old lady, with affected indifference.

"Oh, not at all like Captain Walters," answered the girl, in a tone of indignation. "They are beautiful eyes, very frank, and——"

"Tender," suggested the invalid, smiling.

"Yes, that is the word—tender," answered the girl, simply. "I don't think that Mr. Darall would hurt a fly; and yet, when one saw him waiting to meet those wicked men, they looked hard and shining, like drawn swords."

"Do you mean the men did?"

"No, no; his eyes. There were a hundred of them—I mean of the men, of course—and

yet he was not one bit afraid; nor would he have been, it is my belief, if they had been a thousand."

"I should like to have seen Mr. Darall, if it were but to thank him for what he did for you, Gracie," said her mother, after a pause; "but I suppose I never shall. They say all is for the best, and perhaps it is so. I don't think your papa would like it, you see, since nothing can possibly come of it after all. Don't cry, Gracie; don't cry, my darling!" and, with a dexterous movement of her chair, she brought it close to where Gracie sat at the window. The mother and child embraced without a word. Speech was unnecessary; each knew what the other would have said, and the hopelessness of saying it.

"See, there is Colonel Juxon coming across the square to have a chat with your father," said Mrs. Ray, presently, in her cheerfulest tone. "I wonder what brings him so much earlier than usual!"

"He is come to talk about Mr. Landon and Ella," said Gracie, simply.

"Oh dear, dear! I hope he won't say anything about her torn gown and things, and so set your papa thinking about yours, and wanting to see them, perhaps!"

It is not likely that Colonel Juxon will mention Ella's gown, mamma; it is not as if it were her only one, you know."

"That's true, my dear; I had forgotten. She has only to take another gown out of her wardrobe; and if this Mr. Landon pleases her, and is agreeable, she can take him as easily. Life must be a fine thing to those that are rich—and can enjoy it," added the invalid, in lower tones.

"Dear Ella deserves all she has, mamma," said Gracie, gravely, as if in apology for her friend's prosperity. "She is not spoilt by her riches, but is generous and gracious too."

"I don't deny it, darling," answered her mother with a little sigh that had nothing of selfishness in it. She thought, maybe, if these things came by deserving, that her Gracie might have had her share of them also.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO VETERANS.

"You are come early for your 'crack' to-day, Juxon," was the Commissary's greeting to his friend, as the Colonel entered the low-roofed little parlour which did duty for dining-room in Officers' Quarters, Letter Z. He drew up the whole six feet two of him to meet his guest, and thereby touched, not indeed the stars, but the white-washed ceiling, with his sublime head. This manner of salutation led some folks to aver that Deputy-Assistant-Commissary-General Ray had once been a full private, from which rank he had risen to his present position; but this was an unmerited compliment.

"Early, begad! Yes, I have not even dined," answered the Colonel, sulkily.

"Well, you know, Juxon, we dine early," observed the other, hesitatingly, yet with sufficient distinctness, "that is the rule of our house; but we shall have 'high tea,' as my Gracie calls it; cold things and eggs——"

"Thank you, no, I have not your powers of digestion, Ray. A man who can take 'meat tea' must have the stomach of an ostrich. Dinner's dinner, and it was no light thing that fetched me from home just before feeding time, I promise you. There's the very devil to pay with my Ella, in the shape of a dashed impertinent cadet."

"A cadet!" echoed the Commissary, in his slow reluctant way; "a cadet and your Ella! You really astonish me."

"Maybe I shall astonish you more presently," answered the Colonel, coldly.

"My dear sir, you mistake me. I intended to express sympathy," returned the Commissary. "That a young woman so gifted by Nature and by Fortune as Miss Ella—should have—and a cadet too—— By-the-bye, you have not mentioned how far the thing has gone."

"It has gone, and shall go, no farther than I can help, sir, you may be dashed sure of that. But my niece, you know, is her own mistress, that's the difficulty."

"Difficulty indeed," said the Commissary. "To be too well provided for, in a girl's case, is much more dangerous than not being provided for at all."

"I don't want your philosophical reflections, Ray, but your advice. If a beggarly cadet were to come courting your daughter, for example, what would you do?"

"What would I do?" repeated the Commissary, slowly. "Well, the question is, rather, what would I not do? The probability is, to begin with, that I should wring his neck."

"Quite right," observed the Colonel, approvingly. "That is the idea that would first occur to every well-constituted mind; but one can't do it in these times. I can remember the day when no more was thought of what became of a cadet than a cat, but that's all over now, and the Service is going to the devil. A word or two to Sir Hercules, spoken in season, might of course get him expelled from the Academy, but then he would be loose, and so much the more dangerous."

"He wouldn't come to Officers' Quarters, Letter Z, twice," observed the Commissary, fingering his grizzled moustache.

"Very likely not; indeed, I should say certainly not," replied the Colonel, dryly. "But he

would come to Hawthorne Lodge as often as you please, and oftener."

"Not unless you gave him victuals," observed the other gravely.

"That is taking a professional view of the affair indeed, Commissary," said the Colonel, laughing.

"Nay, it is only in accordance with common sense; the young beggar would probably not have sixpence to bless himself. A cadet is not a self-supporting institution, you must remember, Colonel."

"That is true in a general way: but I am not certain about it in this case. You make it your business to know everybody's affairs, Sandy, from the commandant's down to the last-joined cadet's—it's all nonsense to deny it, you *do*—and that is why I am come to ask your opinion. You keep your ears open for everything, and quite right too, if it is worth your while. Now, do you know anything of a young fellow up yonder"—and the Colonel jerked his thumb in the direction of the Royal Military Academy—"called Landon?"

"Well, yes, I do. He is the one that keeps the beagles. An uncommon well-to-do young fellow. He is either independent, or has a fool for a father who is very rich. I never took the trouble to inquire which."

"Just so; matters had not come so near to you as to suggest that. Well, they have come very near to me. Now, put yourself in my place. If this young Landon, being his own master—or who could become so by a little persuasion—and presumably rich, were to come to you and ask for your Gracie, what course should you adopt?"

"Well, I should not put myself in a passion, my good sir; that's not the way at all in arranging preliminaries. I should say, 'Sit down, young gentleman,' or words to that effect, and endeavour to bring him to reason. I should say, 'How much money have you, or will you have when you come of age?' or, 'How much is your father prepared to give you?' as the case may be. Then, if he mentioned a proper sum, I should bring out a bottle of wine and treat him, as one gentleman should treat another."

"A deal he'd understand of that," snorted the Colonel; "he'd get dashed drunk, that's all."

"I should take care he did not do that till he had replied to my questions," continued the Commissary, calmly. "Besides, I should take care that Gracie poured it out for him. I should make him feel at home, in short, and then I should say something like this: 'You are a nice young man, as my daughter thinks, and as I for

my part have no reason to doubt. But daughters, my young friend, are rather expensive articles.' "

"Ah, you would go into the question of her settlements at once, would you?" inquired the Colonel.

"Not at all, Juxon, not at all," answered the other, with a wave of his huge palm; "that would, of course, have to be arranged by the lawyers. What would have to be settled, in the first place, would be how much the young gentleman was prepared to give *me*."

"What, as commission on the transaction? By gad, that's a good idea!" cried the Colonel, slapping his thigh and laughing heartily.

"Not at all, Juxon, not at all; you go too fast," pursued the Commissary, gravely. "I should only stand out for my rights as a father. 'Here is this young lady,' I should say, 'a prize in the matrimonial lottery, indeed, my dear young friend, but who has cost me much in the rearing. You see her in a state of perfection; a state, let me tell you, that is not attained for nothing, and up to this moment she has been entirely unremunerative to me. Before I can enter into any preliminaries, therefore, on her account, my own just expectations must be satisfied. I must have—say a thousand pounds, to recoup me for expenses.' "

"You are a devilish sharp fellow, Sandy," said the Colonel, admiringly. "Your notion is altogether good, though it smacks a little of the savage, don't it? You and I have been in places, for instance, where a young woman's father had to be recompensed with a cow or a pig, or even a string of beads, before she was allowed to change hands, eh?" And the Colonel dug his companion playfully in the ribs, as though with significant reference to some particular transaction of this nature.

"Tut, tut; one may learn of everybody," said the Commissary. "There's worse people than savages in this world."

"That's true, Sandy, so long as you and your likes are in it," responded the other frankly. "So, that's what you would say to this young Landon, is it, if the matter really comes to any head—you would make it a question of compensation?"

"I would make it such a question, undoubtedly," replied the Commissary. "I should be a fool to do otherwise. But I don't say that *you* should make it so. You have not the feelings of a father—how should you have, since you have never had his expenses? Miss Ella is but your sister's daughter——"

"Who the devil told you that?" interrupted the Colonel, snappishly.

"Well, she's your niece, and her name ain't Juxon. So it's clear she must be—unless, indeed—— No, then she wouldn't have any money of her own——"

"There's a nut for you to crack, gossip; only mind you crack it by yourself," said the Colonel, with a dash of ferocity in his bantering tone. "Well, whoever she is, this young fellow is after her, and it will take all I know to manage matters, if once she gets the bit between her teeth. I am sincerely obliged to you for your advice and your information, Sandy, and, in return, I will just tell you a bit of news that concerns yourself."

"News, and about myself? You don't mean to say that the Master-General has hearkened at last to any word of mine—or, perhaps, to that of a good friend, such as one Colonel Juxon—and is about to remember an old and tried public servant, eh man?" and the Commissary's stony face grew for a moment almost conciliatory.

"Old you are, Sandy, and tried you may have been for what I know," replied the Colonel, laughing, "but as to your promotion, I have heard nothing. What I have to say is connected solely with your domestic affairs: there's a cadet after your Gracie as well as after my Ella!"

"A cadet after my Gracie!" yelled the Commissary, for the moment startled out of his habitual equanimity of manner; "she dare not do it, sir; I don't believe it."

"My dear sir, she has done nothing amiss that I am aware of—nothing more than what you take so coolly in my girl's case. It seems that she and Ella were rescued, by this Landon and another cadet, from some scoundrels out of Charlton Fair."

"Not such scoundrels as themselves, I'll warrant!" broke in the Commissary bitterly. "But what was this other one's name? Not that it signifies, for they are all good for nothing alike, except perhaps your man, Landon. It's just like my luck that Gracie should have picked out the poor one."

"Nay, I don't think she picked him out," observed the Colonel, with an amused air; "it seems to me that he picked her out."

"Then why didn't he pick the other out—I mean Miss Ella—it would have been all the same to him, and have left Landon to my Gracie."

"I'm sure I don't know, Commissary," chuckled the Colonel, "there's something of fancy perhaps in such little preferences. You are very welcome to Landon now, if you can

persuade him to transfer his affections. But I am bound to say," added he slyly, "from Ella's account, that this other young fellow is a fine, handsome, soldier-like lad, such as most men would be proud to call their son-in-law, and showed a great deal of courage."

The Colonel expected an outburst, but his companion quietly answered: "There was a tolerable scrimmage then, was there?"

"Scrimmage! I believe you. You have heard of course that the cadets marched down to the Fair, and took the place as it were by assault. Then afterwards there was another row, in which these two were alone concerned. To give the devil his due, this Landon seems to have fought like a wild cat, and his friend to have backed him loyally."

"That's good," said the Commissary, rubbing his hands, "for from what I know of Sir Hercules, he will not easily look over a first offence, certainly not a second; so this young blackguard is safe to be expelled. He can't live on here, like a young bear, by sucking his paws, and so we shall get rid of him."

"You're a deuced grateful creature, Sandy, and that's a fact," grinned the Colonel, rising and putting on his forage-cap. "I only wish Miss Ella was as easy to deal with as your Gracie

is like to be; but you have such a persuasive way with your women-folk."

"I never swear at them at all events," observed the Commissary, dryly. "Good afternoon to you." And so they parted on the very verge of a quarrel, as the worthy pair had been wont to do every other day for the last ten years. If the Colonel was given to use worse language than the Commissary, he had not been endowed with a worse temper. In the latter's case, there being no verbal outlet, his ire took the form of moroseness and soured the whole man. The ebullition of rage to which he had given way, when his friend had informed him of Gracie's adventure, had been but momentary, and even now, when he was left alone with that unwelcome piece of intelligence, and was considering it, a shade of yellow that mingled with the brick-dust colour of his complexion alone betrayed his annoyance. It was as sufficient an indication, however, to the members of his family that something was amiss with him, as is a flag upside down to mariners.

His wife and daughter noticed this baleful signal, as the Commissary entered what he was always wont to call "my drawing-room."

It was an apartment furnished entirely by his own taste, and he was doubtless jealous lest any-

one else should have the credit of it. The backs of the half-dozen chairs it contained, and also of the little sofa, were all of mother-of-pearl, and presented to the astonished eye each a picture of some famous edifice. Windsor Castle, St. Paul's, and the Tower of London, were all thus portrayed, and if not quite as large as the originals, the effect of them was very striking. The back of the sofa represented Westminster Abbey by night; the windows were lit up as if by flame, so that nervous ladies with muslin gowns had sometimes declined to sit upon it. Each picture, the Commissary said, had been executed by a first-rate R.A. If it had really been so, the R.A. ought himself to have been executed immediately on the completion of his work, for anything more hideous could not be imagined. But in this, I think, the proprietor was mistaken; the execution must have been mechanical, and had not been, perhaps, quite so expensive as he would have it believed. The Colonel said—nay, swore—that it was "all oyster-shells."

"What nonsense is this, Mrs. Ray, about Gracie and some cadet?" inquired the lord of all this grandeur with stern abruptness.

"It is no nonsense, papa——" commenced Gracie.

"You are not going to venture to tell me,

I hope, that there is anything serious?" interrupted he in harsh slow tones.

"No, papa," answered the girl, trembling a little in spite of the courage she always strove to assume in her mother's presence; "I only meant to say that there was no flirtation, or anything that could be objected to. A very great service, and at great risk to themselves, was done to me and Ella by two young gentlemen—cadets—in rescuing us from some very rude people; and I do hope, papa, that you will take some notice of it—I mean in the way of thanks."

"And what is it, may I ask, that you expect me to do? Am I to go and call upon this young whipper-snapper, whose very name you have not yet given yourself the trouble to tell me? Upon my word, Mrs. Ray, I cannot congratulate you upon the manner in which your daughter has been brought up. To dictate to her father, and at the same time to keep him in ignorance of an important fact! Perhaps I am at once to send an invitation to dinner, addressed to 'Blank Blank, Esq., Royal Military Academy'?"

"No, no, papa; only, if he comes to ask after me—or anything—as it is only likely he may do——"

"If who comes?" inquired the Commissary,

growing perceptibly more yellow. "Am I never to hear this gentleman's name?"

"Darall, papa—Hugh Darall!"

"A very fine name, with figure and face to match, no doubt. If I ever catch you asking him to this house, or giving him the least encouragement, Miss Gracie, I do assure you, you will both repent it. Not that you are likely to set eyes on him again, for he is pretty certain to be expelled for this day's work at Charlton Fair."

"Oh, papa, and I shall have been partly the cause of it! How ungrateful and unkind he will think me, never to give him one word of thanks!"

"I'll be sworn you have given him that already, and perhaps a word or two too much. Let there be no more of them, miss. I happen to know that he's a beggarly fellow, without a shilling."

"I know he has no money, papa, though he can't help that; and he has also a poor mother dependent upon him——"

Mrs. Ray closed her eyes, as it was her custom to do when expecting an outbreak of her husband's wrath, but the evident emotion of Gracie had stayed its torrent. Her father saw that she was crying bitterly, and he remembered

that it would disfigure her for the evening party to which she was engaged that night.

"Don't be a fool, Gracie," he said, in a tone which he confidently believed to be a conciliatory one; "I don't want to be unreasonable. So long as it is quite understood that this young fellow is not to be encouraged, I have no objection to your being civil to him. If he calls here within the next few days I suppose you must see him—of course, in your mother's presence—and get rid of him as well as you can. If he puts off calling to a later date we may take it for granted that he has some prudence, or thinks nothing serious of the matter; and you will, in that case, instruct Janet to say: 'Not at home.'"

"That is all I wanted, papa," sobbed Gracie, softly; "only not to seem discourteous and unkind."

"Very good! Now let us have no more tears. One system of waterworks of that sort in a house"—here he cast a contemptuous glance at the invalid—"is quite sufficient. If your eyes are red when your chaperon, Mrs. Murdock, comes to call for you, I shall be exceedingly annoyed. And mind you are civil to Captain Walters to-night; forget what I said about him the other evening. Circumstances alter

cases; and I happen to know that an aunt of his died suddenly last week, and has left him a pretty penny."

Here the Commissary stalked out of the room, and, as soon as he had got outside the door of it, winked to himself with great significance. This wink expressed not only general approval of his own persuasive way with womankind, but a certain particular satisfaction. "There is no fear of Mr. Hugh Darall's paying his visit in any particular hurry," he muttered, "inasmuch as I happen to know that the whole Cadet Corps are confined to barracks till further orders."

The Commissary was justly credited with "happening to know" most things, and especially for his possession of the very latest local information.

CHAPTER IX.

"'HE COMETH NOT,' SHE SAID."

Colonel Juxon had a soft place in his head —he had an eye for art. It did not take the more objectionable form of an opinion on paintings or statuary, but contented itself with pronouncing when a woman was well dressed, or not; and he noticed, when Ella came down to breakfast the next morning, that she was more carefully attired than usual.

"Expecting that young fellow," was his verdict, which did not, however, escape his lips, for he was in the main a prudent man. He expressed his immediate sentiments with great vigour upon every subject that moved him, and he was very easily moved; but when his nature had been so far indulged it became placable enough. When he had knocked his man down, unless in the case of any deep-

seated animosity, when he was adamant, he was quite prepared to listen to reason; and in the case of a woman, after his first outburst, he was rather weak, and apt to give way, especially if she were young and good-looking. For his niece, Ella, he had really considerable affection; but there was another cause which bound her still more nearly to him. She had quarrelled with her father, whom he most cordially detested; and, though it was not so great a compliment as if they had been good friends, still it was a matter of great personal satisfaction to him that she had left the paternal roof for his own. He had had the opportunity of "sleeping upon the matter" of the girl's *penchant* for this cadet, and had come to the conclusion that, if it came to anything, there would, after all, be some satisfaction to be got out of it; for, however distasteful such an alliance might be to himself, it would probably be much more disagreeable to her parent, his enemy. That it might come to something he thought very probable, from what he knew of the young lady herself; especially if there was opposition. And if it did, it was better that the thing should be done with his own consent, and in the teeth of her father. So he had resolved to let things "slide," and

in the meantime to make up for his late indignation by civility.

"Well, Ella, my darling, what are your plans for the morning?" inquired he, looking up from his devilled kidney. He liked everything hot and peppered, as though his nature had needed stimulants of that exciting kind, which was certainly not the case.

"Plans, Uncle Gerard?" replied Ella, laughing, "one would think I was an engineer to hear you talk. A sortie to Gracie in the course of the day will, I daresay, be the extent of my military operations."

"Perhaps you would like to come with me to the marshes; there are some interesting experiments to be tried with the new gun, and I will drive you down there in the pony-carriage, or anywhere else you please."

"Thank you, uncle, I don't think I feel quite up to a drive to-day. My nerves—though I know you don't believe I have any—are still a little shaken after yesterday's adventure; and I am afraid poor Gracie's will be in a much worse state—she was quite hysterical."

"My friend the Commissary has some excellent remedies for hysterics," replied the Colonel, grimly; "I daresay he has given her a sedative by this time."

"I daresay he has behaved like a brute, if you mean that," said Ella. "How you can be intimate, my dear uncle, with such a 'pernicious villain'——"

"Ella, Ella, what language!" exclaimed the Colonel reprovingly, and turning up the whites of his eyes; "who could have taught you such words?"

"Well, it was Mr. William Shakespeare," returned the young lady demurely, "and I am sure he had not a greater ruffian in his eye, when he made use of them, than Mr. Ray."

"Acting-Deputy-Assistant-Commissary-General Ray, if you please, my dear; he would be very indignant if he knew you called him Mr. Ray."

The Colonel, however, was by no means indignant; he has a hearty contempt for the Commissariat Department, and indeed for every walk of human life which was not distinctly military; and as to his "Sandy," he did not make the exception which the Greenwich pensioner of those days made with respect to his hospital; he abused his friend himself, and allowed everybody else to do the like. The Colonel was by no means a popular man, but the Commissary was much less acceptable to the general public, and it was therefore agreeable to

the former to hear him ill-spoken of, a pleasure that rarely failed him.

"Well, I am afraid Sandy's a bit of a tyrant," admitted the Colonel, with an air of charity, as though tyranny were a crime whereof no one could possibly accuse *him*, and of which he might therefore speak with disinterestedness.

"He is a bully and a coward," observed Ella, sententiously.

"Dear me, is that Shakespeare again?" inquired the Colonel, "I am quite shocked."

The notion of Colonel Gerard Juxon being shocked at anything, much less at a little strong language, was certainly very funny, and so it seemed to strike himself, for he laughed immoderately. "'A bully and a coward!' the idea of such words being applied to the Commissary, just because he keeps order in his family! It is lucky you're not a man, Ella, or he would have your blood."

"It's lucky for him," returned Ella, with flashing eyes, "for if I were a man, I should do something dreadful to him. To see how he behaves to his poor wife and Gracie; I declare I sometimes long to knock his wicked, aggravating, ugly head off!"

"Ella, you must not quote Shakespeare with such accuracy," interrupted the Colonel, reprov-

ingly, "or I must buy you a Bowdlerised edition. You're a clever good girl if it wasn't for passion and strong language — strong language and passion, these are your foibles; apart from them you're charming. You say you have made no plans for yourself this morning; but perhaps you have made some for me?"

"For you, uncle? How could I?"

"That's what *I* say; how could she, the little vixen? But then I know there is no limit to her tyranny. Talk of Sandy!—his way is mild and paternal compared with yours. Now tell me frankly, would you rather have my room or my company this morning—eh, dear?"

The Colonel, who had been a sad dog in his day, had a very roguish manner, when he chose to wear it, which became him admirably, and he put it on upon the present occasion. Doubtless it had thrown many a young person of the opposite sex into a delightful embarrassment and confusion in its time, but it had no such effect on Ella.

Just the faintest blush touched the tender dusk of her cheek, as she replied with all simplicity, "Well, since you put the two alternatives before me so distinctly, uncle, I must make some choice; your company is always agreeable, while your room is only sometimes so; but just on this particular morning—with the

sun on the other side of the house, it is so cool, you know, I really think——"

"Well, what, you impudent little witch? You don't mean to say that——"

"Yes, Uncle Gerard, just for this morning" (this with a profound curtsy) "I prefer your room."

If her decision was unflattering, the way she put it was almost attractive enough to make up for it. No more winning smile ever accompanied a maiden's "Yes" than that which mitigated the Colonel's dismissal; he put on his cap without a word of remonstrance, and pulled out his cigar-case, a sure sign of his departure from the Lodge. It was too small a house to smoke in; too small also for a *tête-à-tête* interview in one of its sitting-rooms while a third person occupied the other, the windows of both being open, contiguous and fronting the same lawn. The Colonel never flattered himself, like the famous Cambridge professor, that "he knew everything except botany;" but affairs of the heart, and how to treat them, he imagined with some justice that he did understand. He would indeed have made a most excellent chaperon, had he but been of the other sex, and could he have subdued a certain predilection for making love upon his own account, which, notwithstanding his years, was as strong as ever.

"She can't say I haven't given the young scamp a fair field," muttered he, as he strode away with jingling spurs and clanking scabbard. "I wish I could add 'and no favour,' but she shall just take her own way, and thank me whatever comes of it. It will be a nuisance, of course, though not half so disagreeable for me as it will be for John" (here he grinned, not at all as he was wont to grin at the fair sex) "if the thing really comes to a head; but it is ten to one that it never will, and she will still owe me a debt of gratitude."

From which it will be seen that the Colonel was a bit of a diplomatist, though it would have mortally offended him to be called such.

So Ella waited within her bower, now comparing her little gold watch with the clock on the mantlepiece; now peering through the folds of the muslin curtain of the window that looked towards the entrance gate; and now taking up a book, and throwing it down again with an air of weariness that would have made its author, could he have beheld it, call her downright plain. No one else of the male sex could, however, have passed any such verdict upon her. She had never, in fact, looked more bewitching than on that particular morning; her complexion, though dark, was clear, and feared the sunlight

no more than any peach on the garden wall; her large eyes bore no trace of the fire that had flashed from them on the previous day, but were as tender as a gazelle's; on the side of each little ear hung a dainty curl, so small that it could be hardly seen, notwithstanding its raven blackness, until you came quite near, when never did ear-ring look half so fair as it.

Until the clock struck ten she was a picture of still life; afterward, the posture changed, and presently the manner also. Her rose of a mouth would pout, becoming, as it were, "a bud again;" a shadow would cross her lovely face, and she would pace the room with such impatient steps, that her silk dress murmured at such vulgar speed. To make preparations for what does not occur is, with men, counted as loss, but it is not always so with women. No woman ever regretted having put on a becoming dress, even if there has been none but the looking-glass to whom to show it; and now that the hours went by, and he for whom she waited came not, this beautiful gown of Ella's began to assert itself, and even to suggest things. She sat down suddenly at a writing-table, and dashed off a note; then ringing for the servant, said: "Let this be taken at once—at once, I say—to Miss Furbelow's." She was not generally imperious to the

domestics, and when the man had left the room, she repented of her manner.

"I am a fool," said she; "a self-willed fool, to be thus put out. Perhaps he cannot come, or perhaps he will not. Why should I have taken it for granted that he would? He has made and broken promises before, I'll warrant; and why not to me? Yet he seemed the soul of truth. How noble he looked when all that mob of villains set upon him. Yet a man may be brave and lie. I know that Uncle Gerard despises me for what I am doing, and now he will laugh at me. It is humiliating, it is shameful. Thank Heaven, there is the gate-bell at last."

In a moment she had seated herself in an arm-chair with a book in her hand—a languid picture of indifference.

"A note, miss."

"Very good, Williams; is there any answer required?"

"No, miss; the messenger said he was just to hand it in."

"Then leave it on the table."

Her eyes reverted to her book till the door had closed upon the man, then she seized the note with avidity. It was an ordinary little billet enough, with R. M. A. upon the seal,

which might have stood for Royal Marine Artillery; but she knew it did not.

"Dear Miss Mayne," ran the contents, "I should of course have done myself the pleasure of calling at Hawthorne Lodge this morning, had it not been for the unpleasant circumstance that the whole Academy is 'under arrest till further orders;' so that I am necessarily confined to the Enclosure. I sincerely trust that you feel none the worse for your adventure of yesterday.—Yours faithfully,

"CECIL H. LANDON.

"P.S. If your uncle would put in a word with Sir Hercules in favour of poor Darall, I should feel greatly obliged. I am afraid matters are looking serious for him."

If it had been a lady's note, the importance of the postscript could not have borne a greater ratio to the contents of the epistle; it was not the postscript, however, which first engaged Ella's attention, but the signature.

"Cecil," murmured she; "what a pretty name! it almost sounds like music. And he signs himself 'Yours faithfully.'"

She put the letter on her knee, and looked

up with a happy smile, as though he were there in person. "Yours faithfully"—he could not have chosen a better word. She did not guess, however, how it had been chosen. The fact was that the composition of this epistle, short as it was, had exercised Mr. Landon's intelligence not a little; so much so, indeed, that he had called in the aid of his friend Darall to decide upon its terms.

"I must write to the girl, you see, to explain why I am not able to call according to promise; but how the deuce am I to address her? 'Mr. C. H. Landon presents his compliments' is cold, and I don't want her to think I'm cold; and besides, though it's easy enough to begin in that way, I always find myself getting into the first person before I've done with it."

"That's your egotism," observed Darall, dryly; "I should begin 'Dear Madam.'"

"That is your prudishness," replied Landon, "and also your ignorance; don't you know that you only write 'Madam' to a married woman?"

"Well, then, try 'Dearest Ella.'"

"Now, don't be a fool, Hugh. I really want your ideas upon the subject. I suppose it won't do to begin with 'My' dear anything; it must be plain 'Dear.'"

"I don't think she would like plain 'Dear.'"

Here ensued a temporary interruption to the composition of the billet-doux. Landon threw the pen-tray at Darall's head, and Darall, who was engaged in plan-drawing at the time in question, returned his fire with a chunk of india-rubber.

"Now look here, Hugh, be serious. I believe, if you were writing to the other one—the pasty-faced one—you would not treat the matter as a joke."

"If you mean Miss Ray by the 'pasty-faced one,' I don't agree with you, Landon; and I also think it a very coarse and ungentlemanly way to speak of any young lady."

"There now, you're vexed, old fellow, and I'm glad of it, since you will no longer be full of your jokes. Miss Ray is lovely, and only second to my own charmer. Come, I can't say more than that. I think 'Dear Miss Mayne' is the proper thing; it isn't improper, at all events, like 'Madam.'"

"No, I don't think it's improper; but I do think it's a little impudent."

"She'll like it all the better for that," remarked Landon, with the air of one who knows the sex. "I am quite sure she was

rather struck with your humble servant. You know I had more opportunities for making the running with her than you had with the other one. Then again about the finish; it won't do to say 'Yours always,' I suppose—eh?"

"I should certainly suppose not; the idea of 'always' after seeing her yesterday for the first time! What do you say to 'Yours truly?'"

"I say 'certainly not;' I wrote that to my tailor the other day, in acknowledgment for sending me a ten-pound note, and putting it down in the bill as two coats. When one's tailor is one's banker, one is bound to be civil, you see; but I want to be something more than civil to this young woman. I want to suggest affection and constancy, and all that, without exactly saying it, you know."

"That often means that a man wants to be a scoundrel," observed Darall, dryly. "However, why not say, 'Yours faithfully,' then?"

"The very thing, my dear boy; here goes. And now what can I do for you in return? Shall I say in the postscript that my friend, Mr. Hugh Darall, begs to send his affectionate remembrances to her friend, Miss Grace Ray?"

"Indeed you will do nothing of the kind,"

said Darall, blushing to the roots of his curly hair. "I beg you will not mix up my name in any way with that young lady's. It is not fair to her, and would be considered, and rightly, a great impertinence."

"I don't see it, Hugh. You don't suppose you're inferior to any Commissary-General—though I don't believe her governor is anything like even that—that ever starved an army, I do hope!"

"No, no, Landon, it isn't that. But if my name was coupled with his daughter's, he would very naturally associate starvation with it. Why, in all probability, I shall not even have my pay to live upon now."

Darall got up, as he said these words, and walked quickly out of the room, leaving his pen-work upon the table. "He has borne up like a man, but he is desperately in the blues, I know. Poor old fellow!" murmured Landon, tenderly. "It will be very hard lines if old Pipeclay takes the bread out of his mouth—and his mother's mouth too—just because he was too proud and too honest to sham Abraham. It's a deuced nice world, upon my life. I know what I'll do," added he after a minute's reflection. "I'll drop a hint to Miss Ella to set that tiger-cat of an uncle of hers to speak a good word to Sir

Hercules for Darall." And thereupon he wrote that postscript to Ella with which we are already acquainted.

"How like him!" she exclaimed, when she read it. "How like what I have pictured his generous and chivalrous nature to be, thus to think of his friend's danger and not his own!"

She forgot, or did not choose to remember, that Landon had told her that no decision which the authorities at the Academy might come to would damage his own future.

"How lightly he hints, too, of my 'adventure,' as he calls it, of yesterday, as though he had never risked life and limb to save me from insult. His style is self-possessed enough, but I think I can see evidences of emotion."

This referred to the rather shaky execution of the word "Dear," which was, in fact, referable to the chunk of india-rubber; the beginning of "faithfully" was also slightly smudged; was it possible he had almost written "fondly?" A blush mounted to her cheek as the thought passed through her mind, and no wonder. It was very shocking, as well as unreasonable, that she should entertain such ideas respecting any young gentleman upon so short an acquaintance; but then love is rarely reasonable, and love at first sight the least so of all.

Ella was still castle-building upon this epistle —for though the area was limited, her materials were inexhaustible, and there was nothing to prevent her from carrying her edifice up to the very heaven—when her uncle returned to luncheon.

"Well, Ella?"

"Well, uncle?" You would have thought, by the indifference of her air and tone, that she had been engaged during his absence in the most sublunary manner—pastry making, without so much as "kissing-crust," or ironing.

"Has no one been since I have been away, then?"

"Not that I know of; but I am expecting my milliner, Miss Furbelow. Had you good practice in the marshes?"

"Yes; it is not over yet. If you should have changed your mind, and feel inclined for a drive in the pony-chaise, my offer is still open."

"I always enjoy a drive with you, Uncle Gerard."

"Umph," said the Colonel; "I suppose that means you won't go."

"On the contrary, I should like it of all things; but I don't care about the marshes; those big guns deafen me so. I should like a quiet drive into the country—Shooter's Hill way."

"Yes, the way to bring us round by the Royal Military Academy!" returned the Colonel, grimly. "You can do as you please, Miss Ella, —the more's the pity; but I honestly tell you I do not approve of such a proceeding; it is not becoming in you thus to throw yourself at the head of any young fellow; moreover, if I know my own sex, it will defeat your own object with him. It is not for a young girl like you to make the first advance. If he had called here this morning, as you expected him to do, that would have been another matter, perhaps; but——"

"He can't call, Uncle Gerard," returned Ella, with a little sigh; "the poor young gentlemen are all under arrest."

"How the deuce did you know that, miss?"

"Mr. Landon has written to tell me so," returned Ella, demurely.

A soft mellifluous whistle was the Colonel's reply.

CHAPTER X.

A VISIT TO THE PRISONERS.

THERE had been not a few rows at "the Shop" in its time: its natural atmosphere was of that character that could only be cleared by storms; but there had never been such a row as that Charlton Fair row. It would have been difficult, as in another world-famous locality, to find twenty righteous, or even ten, in the place, during periods of commotion: so many were tarred with the same brush of insubordination. But upon the present occasion there was absolutely no one who could plead "Not guilty," save some half-dozen gentlemen-cadets who had the great good fortune to be in hospital, though, of course, among those were not included Messrs. Bright and Jefferson, the very *belli terterrima causa*—"the beggars who started the whole thing," as the unclassical Landon expressed it.

It was perfectly understood, too, that these immaculate half-dozen would have joined the rest of the rioters, had they but had the opportunity; so that it seemed absurd, even to the authorities themselves, to raise them to the extreme pinnacle of promotion—as must needs be the case if all the others should be depressed, or still more suppressed — in reward for an indisposition which was purely physical. Moreover, if all these gentlemen-cadets were expelled *en masse*, what would become of the corps of the Royal Engineers and of the Artillery, to which the Military Academy was, as it were, the feeder? It was usual enough for promotion to be impeded at the other end of the military career, but stagnation at the commencement would be fatal. Doubtless the more sagacious of the juniors took this fact into their consideration when they entered into revolt with so light a heart, foreseeing that, whatever havoc authority should make among the ringleaders, they, the mere rank and file, must rather benefit than otherwise, and could in no case be themselves obliterated from the muster-roll of their country's heroes.

But in respect to the old cadets, or old offenders—for the words were unhappily synonymous in those days — matters looked very black. Authority, long contemned, had been in

this instance placed so publicly at defiance, that it was necessary that examples should be made. The only question was how many examples? The authorities were by no means in a hurry to come to a decision, for the matter was really momentous; and perhaps they took into account that delay, since it involved suspense, would in itself be no light punishment to the culprits. And in the meantime the "poor young gentlemen," as Ella called them, were confined to their barracks.

Forbidden to "walk up and down" the outside world, after the manner of the Father of Evil, they were obliged to content themselves with tormenting the poor "neuxes" within their boundaries; and thus, if they did not repent of their disobedience themselves, they at least caused others to repent of it.

Landon, however, to do him justice, was not one to bully anybody for the sake of bullying, whatever pain he inflicted out of "gaiety of heart;" and he and Darall were pacing the parade-ground together on the afternoon succeeding the expedition to the Fair, engaged in serious talk. That Darall should be depressed was natural, under the circumstances; but it seemed to his friend that his melancholy was out of proportion to his peril.

"Come, old fellow, you take too gloomy a view of this affair," said he; "if you are to be lost to the Service through yesterday's escapade, what sinner of us all is to be saved?"

"It is not only this row, and its consequences, that is troubling me," returned the other, kicking the pebbles away as he spoke; "I am altogether out of humour with my lot in life; it seems so devilish hard, somehow, to be so poor."

"Harder than it seemed yesterday, do you mean, old fellow?" inquired Landon, slyly.

"Well, yes, it does seem harder. Of course it is very foolish to entertain such regrets, but when I think of those nice girls we met yesterday afternoon——"

"Steady, steady, my good friend; you must not think of both of them; besides, one of them is copyright."

"Well, when I think of that nice girl that I met yesterday, so sweet, and modest, and good-humoured, and reflect that I am so situated that I shall never in all human probability be in a position to ask her to become my wife——"

"Never is a long day, Hugh," interrupted his friend, laughing; "and in due time, when you have got your company, you will meet with another girl just like her."

"There is none like her—none!" exclaimed Darall, passionately.

"My poor Hugh, is it indeed so bad as that, then?" said Landon, pityingly. "I had no idea you were so smitten."

"Well, of course I have no right to be, as though I were a fellow like yourself, who has money at his back, and is his own master," returned Hugh, bitterly. "I was a fool even to talk about it; but you will do me the justice to say that I at least never dreamt of calling upon Miss Ray, or of writing a letter to her."

"My dear Hugh, there is no reason in the world why you should not call, except that you can't leave the barracks; and as to my writing to Miss Mayne, I should not have dreamt of doing so, save to excuse myself from not calling, which I had promised to do. By the time I am my own master, as you call it—that is, when I am informed that the Queen has no more occasion for my services—this girl will have probably forgotten all about me—— By jingo! there they both are in that pony carriage yonder."

"Where?" cried Darall, excitedly; "I only see an officer and a lady."

"Well, they are the Colonel and Miss Mayne;

you don't suppose the two girls would have called upon us alone, do you? See, they have stopped at the lodge, and the Colonel is beckoning to us."

"He is beckoning to you, not to me," said Darall curtly, and as his companion ran off to the gateway he turned to a group of old cadets who were engaged in hanging neuxes over the wall of the sunk fence by one arm, it is to be hoped with some scientific view of testing the power of endurance in the human muscle. In these days, when even the vivisection of animals is objected to, this practice would be called cruel, and Darall was so far ahead of his age as to hold it to be so.

"I tell you what, you fellows," said he, in a tone of remonstrance, "if Whymper drops"—for it was that unhappy young gentleman who was in process of suspension—"he'll break—his arrest."

His tormentors pulled him up in an instant. The idea of breaking his bones, or even his neck, would not have alarmed them, but to make him break his arrest, by being dropped out of the precincts of "the Enclosure," would have been an inexpiable wrong indeed. The cultivation of truth—mainly, however, in connection with martial matters—was carried to

such perfection at the Royal Military Academy, that other branches of morality suffered, just as a high-pressure mathematical system sometimes produces wranglers who can't spell. "*Fiat Justitia ruat cœlum*" was their second motto —"*Ubique,*" it will be remembered, was their first—and its free translation was, "Break all the commandments, but not your word."

While Darall was thus playing the part of a Don Quixote in rescuing the oppressed, his friend Landon was following his instincts, and making himself agreeable to his Dulcinea. Their meeting—considering it was watched afar by at least fifty gentlemen-cadets, who had fixed their gaze upon the charming Ella with as great unanimity as though they had received the military direction of "Eyes right"—was singularly free from embarrassment. Mr. Cecil Landon was gifted with that very necessary attribute of a warrior—presence of mind; and Ella had no eyes except for him.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Landon," said she, "and so is my uncle, to hear that you are in such trouble."

"Yes, sir," said the Colonel, grumpily, "we are both devilish sorry."

"I only hope," she went on, with a charming smile, "that your present position is not

in any way owing to your gallant behaviour with respect to Miss Ray and myself."

"No, indeed," replied Landon, "though even if it were so I should consider it to be paying very cheaply for what was a great pleasure."

"I believe the whole lot of you will be expelled," observed the Colonel, confidently; he hated compliments to women—unless they were paid by himself.

"Well, indeed, sir, I hope not, for my friend's sake. It is not much importance, in my own case, one way or the other."

"By jingo, if I were Sir Hercules, I would make it of importance to every man Jack of you. The idea of the Cadet Company acting contrary to orders——"

"My dear uncle," interrupted Ella, "pray remember that however awful that crime may be, the commission of it was the cause of your niece being rescued from a most disagreeable situation. That is surely Mr. Darall I see yonder; is it possible he means to cut me?"

"By no means," said Landon; "but the fact is, he is very diffident."

"Diffident?" chuckled the Colonel. "Do you mean to say that the fellow is shy? I should like to see that *lusus naturæ*, a shy cadet, a little nearer."

Whereupon Landon, laughing, beckoned to his friend to come to the gate, and the Colonel, getting out of the pony-carriage, advanced to meet him, leaving the young people alone.

"Darall is afraid to renew his acquaintance with you, Miss Mayne," said Landon, in quick, soft tones, "for fear it should be the means of reintroducing him to your friend, Miss Ray; he is very susceptible, and yet he feels, poor fellow, that further knowledge of her would only lead to disappointment."

"On her side, or his, I wonder?" argued Ella, with a touch of scorn which became her admirably; she was one of those women whose beauty is heightened by piquancy of that sort, whereas Gracie's looks would have suffered from it.

"Of course, upon his side," said Landon; "though I must be allowed to say of Darall that he is worthy of any woman's gracious regard."

"Dear me, Mr. Landon; that is saying a great deal for another gentleman—who is himself so very diffident, too."

"Well, that is the very reason," answered the other, laughing; "since he will never say so much upon his own account."

"I am afraid you are not diffident, Mr. Landon."

"I don't think I am quite so shy as Darall," answered Landon, demurely.

"Nor, let us hope, quite so susceptible?"

"That is true; I am not so easily enraptured; but when it does happen—and it has only happened once—then I feel it very much indeed," and the young gentleman heaved a little sigh.

The colour rose in Ella's cheek, though she strove to suppress it. There could surely be no doubt as to the one instance of which he spoke, and it was very pleasant to hear him express such sentiments.

"Do you think it will be really injudicious of me to speak of your friend to Miss Ray, Mr. Landon? I am sure she would naturally wish to see and thank him—as I confess I did in your case—for his chivalrous behaviour of yesterday; but if it is certain—that is, I mean if his circumstances are so adverse, and he has really allowed himself to think seriously of her upon so very short an acquaintance——"

"I don't think time has much to do with liking," interrupted Landon, with a philosophic air; "one sees an exquisite landscape, for instance, it may be only for once, but its peculiar charm is never forgotten; a thousand beautiful scenes may in their time present themselves,

but they fade away from the mind, while that particular one abides—remains for ever as the fairest."

"Just so," said Ella, flipping at a fly upon the pony's ear with her whip; "and if you grew more familiar with it, its charms would perhaps vanish."

"That would be your fault," answered Landon; "that is," added he hastily, "*my* fault, I mean" (and here the consciousness of having said more than he had intended made his fluent tongue hesitate, while his voice grew very soft and low); "I mean that the true lover —whether of nature, or—or—of any other object —only grows the fonder, the more knowledge he has of that which charmed him at first."

"I think a landscape does grow upon one," said Ella, meditatively.

"And not only a landscape, believe me, Miss Mayne; if the opportunity is only afforded——"

Ella was glad to turn her eyes from his handsome, eager face, and fix them upon Darall, whom the Colonel had now brought up to the side of the carriage.

"Here is the *lusus*," said he, "the prodigy, the one and only specimen of the 'shy cadet' that has appeared since the Academy was founded."

"Then there was no such thing in your time, it appears, uncle," said Ella.

"No, by gad, there wasn't," said the Colonel, confidently; "but, on the other hand, we had not the impudence to break the standing orders."

"Were my uncle and I so very formidable, Mr. Darall, that you were afraid to come near us?" asked Ella, smiling. "We only came to thank you for your gallant service of yesterday."

"I did not think it was worth your thanks, Miss Mayne," answered Darall, blushing to the very roots of his hair.

Landon and Ella regarded him with amused interest. Not a word had these two young folks whispered, be it observed, of a common flame; but they had hinted of it in the case of others, and this is as sure a method of making love as there is. It was astonishing what way they had made with one another, thus indirectly, and under cover of sympathy for their respective friends.

"Oh, that was the reason, was it, Mr. Darall? I assure you that is not my opinion, nor that of my friend, Miss Ray, whom I am just about to visit. She will be sorry to hear that you hold our adventure so lightly. Her notion is that we were rescued from a barbarous rabble by two brave knights. I suppose I may tell her, at

least, that you would have called to inquire after her if it had not been for your arrest."

"Indeed, Miss Mayne, if that was my duty, pray excuse me to her upon the grounds you mention."

"If it was his duty! only listen to that, uncle; surely to call upon a rescued damsel the next morning is set down among the articles of war."

It was very hard of Ella to persecute the young man so; but then women are so hard—except when they are softer than butter.

"Let the poor lad alone," said the Colonel, getting into the carriage, and taking the reins from his niece's hands; "you'll make him deuced glad to be in arrest, and so far protected from these duties, as you call them. It would be a mere compliment, under present circumstances, to ask you to dinner, gentlemen, else I am sure both myself and the Commissary would be delighted to see you."

"Especially the Commissary," said Ella, laughing.

"You are very good, Colonel," said Landon; "but until this row has blown over, we cannot leave the Enclosure, save to go to church," added he in a low tone, as he pressed Ella's hand.

At the same moment Darall saluted the

Colonel, who said, "Good-bye, young fellow; I'll not forget that little matter with Sir Hercules," and then the pony-carriage whirled away towards the town.

"My dear Ella, you don't object, I know, to my speaking my mind," observed the Colonel, after a considerable silence.

"Not at all, uncle; I like people to speak out. But I warn you that if your mind is set against Mr. Landon, your speaking it will be useless."

"You are still thinking seriously about that young man, then? I was in hopes, from your manner—and I must be allowed to add from his—that there was nothing likely to come of it."

Ella bit her lip, and her eyes flashed fire. This was the second time that her uncle had hinted that she was "throwing herself at Landon's head," and this time it had a sting in it, for she was conscious of having given him great encouragement. She was silent for more than a minute, and only just as they reached the Artillery barracks, for which they were bound, inquired carelessly, "Well, uncle, and now for this bit of your mind."

"Nay, Ella, it is not now worth mentioning. Only, if those two young men had been

equally indifferent to you—as I thought they were——"

"Well, uncle, let us suppose that to be the case, so as not to lose your valuable observation."

"I was about to remark, Ella," returned the Colonel viciously, "that in my judgment Mr. Darall is worth at least a dozen of Mr. Landon."

"That will please Gracie very much, for she is quite of your opinion," returned Ella, coolly, "so mind you tell her," and she waved her hand to the young lady in question, who was standing at her window as the pony stopped beneath it.

CHAPTER XI.

AS FRANK AS FAIR.

The arrival of Ella Mayne at Letter Z, Officers' Quarters, was always hailed by the Commissary's household as a godsend; her calls, indeed, were "angel's visits," and something more, since they were neither few nor far between. She seldom came empty-handed, though it was not for her gifts that Mrs. Ray and her daughter welcomed her, but for the sense of brightness and lightness that she brought with her. In her presence good fortune seemed to smile upon them, though it was but at second-hand; and the happiness which she appeared to enjoy, and which they believed her to deserve, instead of making them—as it would do with many folks—more discontented with their own sad lot, rather seemed to reconcile them to it. The fact is that when kind-hearted people are

having a dark time of it, the knowledge that there is sunshine somewhere else is cheering to them, since it strengthens that belief in a Good Providence which needs backing, under such circumstances, much more than prosperous persons are aware of. To those two down-trodden women, the spectacle of their light-hearted and brilliant young friend had the same effect as going abroad is said to have upon our overwrought toilers; it was such a complete change from anything within their own experience, and took them, for the time, so completely out of themselves and their surroundings.

Poor Mrs. Ray snatched a fearful joy from the audacious courage with which Ella faced the Commissary, and expressed opinions in his august presence which she knew he held in abhorrence; it proved him human, and not quite so irresistible as Fate itself. This was really her greatest satisfaction—there seemed somehow a future hope in it for Gracie—though she was by no means untouched by the sympathy Ella showed in a hundred gracious ways for her own sad condition. But it was for this sympathy for her mother that Gracie was most thankful to Ella, and took most delight in her company. As to gifts, they were very welcome, but it was

the manner of giving them that won her heart, and not their value or their frequency. Thanks indeed were forbidden to her. "I will not be thanked, Gracie, for such rubbish; if I denied myself anything in procuring it, then I would permit you to be grateful; but as it costs me nothing that I miss, and gives me such pleasure as I could not buy for ten times the money, I should be getting thanks under false pretences."

No one but themselves would ever have known of Ella's generosity had it not been for their own acknowledgments of it to others; for which they had their reward, as had Ella, also. The ladies of their acquaintance, mostly of the garrison, were wont to remark (by no means in confidence) to one another, that "if it was not for Miss Mayne, they really did not know how that unfortunate Mrs. Ray and her daughter would get on at all. It was lucky that they had no pride about them." They did not, however, go the length of stigmatising them as a designing couple. The motive of Miss Mayne, it seemed, was plain enough; "it flattered her to play the patroness at a cheap rate, though, as everybody was aware, she had more money than she knew what to do with." This last was a circumstance that made Ella extremely unpopular in female military

circles, where money was generally "tight," if it was to be found at all. If *they* had had money, they said, they would like to be able to explain to the public how it was come by. They would much rather not have it on the terms that some people possessed it. Everybody, it is true, knew Colonel Gerard Juxon; but who knew anything about his brother-in-law—if he *was* his brother-in-law—Mr. Mayne? For their parts, they preferred to have parents about whom they could converse; but not a word had either the Colonel or his niece let fall concerning her branch of the family. You might take their word for it that that girl's money was made in trade, if it was not obtained by means still more discreditable. They had not a word to say against the poor Rays, not they; it was reasonable enough that the good lady should take all she could get elsewhere, since her husband was a skinflint, and that Gracie should accept additions to her wretched pin-money from any quarter; but for their parts, Heaven defend them from such a patroness!

Yet it was not at all with the air of a patroness that Ella entered Mrs. Ray's wonderful little drawing-room—gleaming with mother-of-pearl, as though all the furniture had teeth—and made straight for the invalid's chair in

the window, in spite of the huge palm of the Commissary stretched out to welcome her. She always embraced his wife and daughter before giving him the tips of her fingers.

"What, not out in the open air this afternoon, dear Mrs. Ray, and the weather so beautiful! Our pony is not a bit tired, and if you would like a drive——"

"Mrs. Ray has been out in a bath-chair," interposed the Commissary, with the air of the man who had paid for it, "for an hour and three-quarters; it is quite a long outing for her, I do assure you."

"It is, indeed," said Ella, dryly. "Well, then, uncle, if you have no further use for the carriage yourself, I'll send it home, and have half-an-hour's chat with Mrs. Ray and Gracie, if they are not better engaged."

"Better engaged they could not be," observed the Commissary, in his attitude of "attention." His civility to all persons well-to-do in the world was very great, however ungraciously expressed, and all the greater by contrast with his behaviour to his own belongings; at the same time he resented this demand on his politeness, and disliked the objects of it as much as though they were his inferiors; and in particular he detested Ella.

In return for this speech she gave him a little curtsy, the grace of which placed his own clumsiness of demeanour in high relief. "And where have you been driving this afternoon?" inquired he. It was one of his characteristics to engross the conversation as much as possible in his own house, and especially to prevent his womankind from taking part in it.

"Ah! you may well ask that!" said the Colonel, grimly. "We've been—yes, we've been——"

"To Shooter's Hill," interposed Ella, as her uncle stopped and stammered, checked by the concentrated fire of his niece's eyes; "the air was lovely, and the view delightful."

"Yes, the view was deuced fine," assented the Colonel, who had already repented of the temper he had exhibited in depreciating Gentleman-cadet Landon.

"Oh, Ella," said Gracie, in a low voice, "Miss Furbelow has just been here with such a lovely present from somebody."

"Then I know nothing about it," said Ella. "I directed her to send a dress, it is true, but it was only as a substitute for that which I was the cause of getting spoilt."

"What is that I hear about a spoilt dress, Miss Ella?" inquired the Commissary, with

distended ears and an additional wrinkle on his forehead.

"Well, I don't suppose you gentlemen would understand if I told you," returned Ella, sweetly; "if I describe the affair as being of green tulle, trimmed with white *piqué*, and pinked at the flounces *à la rose d'Auvergne*, you would be not much the wiser."

"I thought you said someone had spoilt a dress, Miss Ella."

"So I did. I spoilt a dress—Gracie's dress—by spilling ink upon it. It was when I was writing cheques — which, as you say, is my constant employment. That is the whole story; except that, of course, I have made reparation."

The Commissary was far from pleased, notwithstanding that he understood his daughter had received a gratuitous addition to her wardrobe. He saw that there had been treason in the house; that something had been concealed from him; and he smiled on his wife and daughter, as Bluebeard might have smiled on Fatima while her brothers were making a call; he would have a word to say to them presently. Even the Colonel noticed this; and, willing to do Ella a pleasure, observed, "Come, General, you look yellow; I am sure something is wrong with your liver. Let us take a walk together."

The Commissary was not particular about his complexion, and very pleased when anybody called him "General;" moreover, to be seen in public with the Colonel always gave him importance. So he consented at once. When he had gone, Mrs. Ray and Gracie each gave a little sigh, as though something tight over their chests —or hearts—had been slackened. Ella's shapely lips murmured something which I am afraid was "Beast!" then turned to Gracie with:

"Well, darling, and whom do you think I have seen this afternoon?"

"Not—not Mr. Landon?"

"Yes, and Mr. Somebody Else, too."

"They came to inquire after you, I suppose?" said Gracie, as indifferently as she could. It seemed hard to her that they should have called at Hawthorne Lodge, and not at the barracks also; but, after all, who could wonder at it? Everybody knew how wealthy Ella was, and most people—all, that is, who concerned themselves in so small a matter—in what a poor way her own parents lived. Still one of those two young men might have thought it—not worth his while exactly, no, certainly not that, but—becoming, just to leave his card at Officers' Quarters, Letter Z.

"Not a bit of it," said Ella; "I went to

inquire after them. There, I didn't mean to shock you, dear Mrs. Ray, but only Gracie. Uncle Gerard took me, of course. He thought it his duty to call at the Academy to thank the two young gentlemen for their conduct to us yesterday, since neither of them could come to us, poor dears."

"Why not?" inquired Mrs. Ray. Gracie said nothing, but a pleasant light came into her eyes; perhaps, then, after all, thought she, Mr. Darall would have called if he could.

"The whole Academy are in arrest till further orders," said Ella. "Surely the Commissary, who 'happens to know' everything, must have been aware of that, long ago."

Mother and daughter interchanged a significant glance. This was the reason, then, why Gracie had received his permission to be civil, just for once, to Mr. Darall, if he called within a day or two.

"My husband doesn't tell us everything he hears," said Mrs. Ray, quietly.

"I daresay he thought the matter of no consequence," returned Ella; "and indeed it may very likely be so. Only, as Gracie was interested in Mr. Darall—she has no secrets from you, dear Mrs. Ray, I know—I thought I would come and tell her."

"You are very good, Ella," said the invalid, "and Gracie is very good, God bless her! also. She has told me something about this young gentleman, but it would be very foolish of her, she knows, to think of—to dream of—anything serious coming of it."

"Well, he is a very good young man," persisted Ella, "of that I feel convinced. Mr. Landon said he was worthy of any woman's affection."

"My dear Ella!" exclaimed Mrs. Ray, in a tone of mild reproof, "how on earth came he to tell you that?"

"Oh, I don't know; we got quite communicative and confidential somehow. I honestly confess I think Mr. Landon charming, so you may guess what this Mr. Darall must be, who Uncle Gerard was so obliging as to tell me was worth 'at least a dozen' of Mr. Landon."

"But that was very unkind of him," said Gracie.

"Well, no, it was merely what I call his 'sparkle;' just a glint of fire such as the pony strikes with his hoof from a flintstone when he is playful. Uncle Gerard may 'say things,' but he does not mean much harm, especially when he knows that all the harm in the world can do no good. Gracie, I have met my fate at last! Yes,

I have, and I don't mind your saying 'Oh Ella!' one bit: what I do mind is seeing your dear mother look so grave."

"My dear Ella," answered the invalid, "if I looked grave it was because you scarcely look grave enough; if what you say is really said in sober earnest, the matter is very serious. The happiness—or the misery—" she added, after a little pause of sad significance, "of your whole life depends upon one little syllable, 'Yes' or 'No.' Oh, weigh them well, dear Ella, before deciding."

"But, my dear Ella, do you mean to say that Mr. Landon has asked you already—after two days' acquaintance—to marry him?" inquired Gracie.

"No, dear, no, he has not done that; but he will ask me—I am as certain of it as of the back of that chair being intended to represent Windsor Castle, and of it not being one bit like it; I have also made up my mind what my answer will be. It will be 'Yes.'"

Gracie ran forward to her friend with a little cry of pleasure, and folded her in her arms.

"If I don't run to you, like Gracie, you know the reason why, dear Ella," said the invalid.

"I am coming to you, dear Mrs. Ray," answered the girl, suiting the action to the word; "and though I know you think me headstrong and imprudent, I intend to have your warm congratulations."

"Dearest Ella, you have them, Heaven knows," sobbed the poor lady in tender though broken tones. "You have been very good to a poor, miserable, crippled creature; you have such a heart of gold that no one should grudge you a purse full of it; I have nothing to give you—perhaps not even a marriage present when the time comes—nothing to return for—but that is no matter, I know, to you; but if God should please to hear me on behalf of another—" the pitifulness of her tone was unspeakable, though it had nothing in it of bitterness, "for myself, alas!" it seemed to say, "I have importuned Him in vain"—"then He will bless you, Ella."

There was a long pause, passed in mutual endearments.

It was curious to see how both Ella's companions at once took her scheme of life for granted—immature and improbable, to say nothing of its impropriety, as it must needs have appeared to others. They knew her, however, well; and knowing how difficult it

was to turn her from a caprice, were persuaded that what she had set both mind and heart upon she would accomplish. It was quite in accordance with her audacious nature, too, that having once fixed upon such a plan, she should confide it to these two old friends. She had indeed been almost as open with her uncle. Many girls would have entertained such an idea at equally short notice, but they would have kept it to themselves, and even later on would have had but one confidante. But Ella wore her heart—fierce as flame, stubborn as steel, though it sometimes was—upon her sleeve, albeit not for daws to peck at. She was frank to her friends, though even to them taciturn and uncommunicative enough upon one point.

"Will Uncle Gerard consent to all this, Ella?" inquired Mrs. Ray, stroking the hand on which she already saw, in her mind's eye, the marriage-ring.

"He will have to do so," said Ella, smiling. "I confess I don't think he likes it."

"It is fortunate you are so independent, my dear," sighed the invalid; "few girls are equally so—almost everyone has some relative whose wishes it is her duty to consult. What is the matter, Ella?"

"Nothing; a little faintness, that is all."

"But you turned so deadly pale, darling," said Gracie, with anxiety. "Let me fetch you a glass of wine."

"No, I thank you, it is gone now. Yes, as you were saying, I am fortunate in being my own mistress, in having no tie that would bind me in this matter."

"Unless it were a loving one, Ella," resumed the invalid, thoughtfully. "I would you had a mother—not like me, useless, and a burthen——"

"Mamma!" cried Gracie, in painful accents.

"Forgive me, darling, I know I am no burthen in your eyes; what I wished for Ella was that she had a mother, fond as I—for I will boast so far—but wise as well as tender, to give advice as even she would take it."

"Am I so very self-willed, then?" inquired Ella, gravely.

"Oh, I didn't mean that, dear," exclaimed her hostess, the colour mounting to her worn and weary face.

"Yes, you did; only you did not mean to say it; and it's true; 'temper' is a failing with us," she went on more gaily. "Uncle Gerard is a perfect mule, as I once told him. 'Aye, a mule, indeed,' he said, 'to bear the things

you put on me;' and indeed on that occasion there were faults on both sides."

"This little cross of 'temper' comes from your uncle's side of the house, then, does it?" inquired the invalid. She had taken up her knitting since she last spoke, and when one knits, one's thought for others suffers; the mind grows half unconscious of what is passing, if it does not leap back to what is past. Otherwise this good lady could certainly not have referred, however indirectly, to Ella's family. All they knew of it—and all, as they were well aware, she wished them to know—was that her mother was dead. It was upon this dead mother that Mrs. Ray had inadvertently, and by implication, made reflection.

"Yes," said Ella, in harsh and grating tones, "my temper comes to me that way."

"Oh, Ella, I can see you are offended," cried Gracie, alarmed by her friend's frigid look even more than by her tone. "Mamma is the last person to give offence designedly——"

"Offence!" interrupted the invalid, dropping her work and wringing her hands, as usual with her when greatly moved; "what have I said? What have I done?"

"It is nothing," said Ella, forcing a laugh, and rising from her chair; "nothing, at least,

that is inexpiable. But if you are really racked by remorse, I will impose a penance."

"I am very, very sorry, dear Ella; our friends are not so many—Heaven help us!—that we can afford to offend them."

"My dear Mrs. Ray, you can make it up to me if you please."

"Make it up to you! If there is anything, anything that lies in my poor power, Ella——"

"Well, then, there is. I have often offered to walk by your bath-chair, and you have refused to let me."

"But that is so wearisome for you," pleaded the invalid, "and so unbecoming in a young lady of your position."

"Oh, never mind my dignity," laughed Ella; "let me only have my whim and my way. When you and Gracie go out as usual for your constitutional on Sunday, let me make one of the party."

"By all means, if you really wish it, dear Ella: but I am sure my husband, rather than that should happen, would drive us out in a fly."

"Good gracious! I don't want your husband or his fly," exclaimed Ella, impatiently; "I want the chair, and you, and Gracie. I shall see you in the meanwhile, no doubt, but remember, whatever happens, that is settled. And now,

my dear friends, good-bye, for it is getting near dinner-time, and if the Colonel has to wait, his language is such as should not be repeated—and he does repeat it."

"What on earth was it I said, Gracie, that put out poor Ella so?" inquired the invalid, nervously, so soon as their visitor had left them.

"I don't quite know what it was, dear mamma. You alluded in some way, however, to Ella's family, which is a pity, because we know how she dislikes it. There is some mystery—at all events some unpleasantness—about her parentage, no doubt."

"But why should she want to walk by my wheeled chair?"

"Well, that's another mystery," said Gracie, laughing, and smoothing her mother's hair. "But we shall know the secret of that on Sunday."

CHAPTER XII.

THE YOUNG GENTLEMEN'S VIEW OF IT.

It was strange, considering that Ella had expressed herself so forgivingly with respect to Mrs. Ray's *mal-à-propos* allusion, that she should not again have presented herself at Officers' Quarters, Letter Z, from the date of that occurrence until the Sunday following; but so it was.

To some minds, so long an absence, contrasted with the usual frequency of her visits, might almost have suggested that she wished to mark by it her extreme displeasure, and put out of all possibility any recurrence of what had so much annoyed her. But Mrs. Ray and Gracie were too modest to attach such importance to any word of theirs, and thought it the most natural thing in the world that their prosperous young friend should have engagements of a more attractive nature to take her elsewhere.

This was not, however, the case. Ella kept a good deal within doors during the period in question, and, so far from mixing with society, passed her time chiefly in writing letters and reading them. Only those she read she did not write. A very little time sufficed her to dash off the communications she sent away; whereas those she received, which by comparison with her own were brief enough, she pondered over long and lovingly, and when interrupted, would hurriedly thrust into her bosom. When you fall in love at first sight, a week (that is if you don't fall out of it again by that time) makes a deal of difference in the way of ripening; it is like very warm weather in the month of May, which brings on everything very quickly, though not always to maturity.

Young ladies nowadays do not, I notice, fall in love; they appear to be all furnished, like the railway-trains, with breaks (only these act and the railway ones don't always) to stop themselves at any point of the incline; and no sooner does the danger-signal flash forth (from the eyes of mamma) than they stop themselves instantaneously, and even proceed to retrace their steps.

Ella belonged to an earlier generation, to whom expeditions to Gretna Green had hardly

become a thing of the past. Her affections were strong, her impulses even stronger; the flame of her suddenly-kindled admiration burnt like that of a petroleum well, and it was no one's duty to quench it.

The Colonel saw how the case stood quite plainly; remarked to himself that the girl had got the bit between her teeth, and would run till she found ploughed land, or a clayey soil, and devoutly hoped she would come upon such obstacles; but he uttered no word of remonstrance. He contented himself with making inquiries, "in case the worst should come to the worst" (so he designated the possible union of these two fresh young hearts), into the position and prospects of Mr. Cecil Landon, and found them eminently satisfactory.

His father was something in the City—the Colonel called him a "hunks," but that was his generic term for any elderly person engaged in commercial pursuits—and was very much "respected," a word applied to no class of person while alive, except to City magnates, but reserved for most of us when we have departed this life. There was no doubt in the Colonel's mind but that the old "hunks" would "jump" at the notion of his son's alliance with the house of Juxon. If any slip between the cup and the lip

were to be hoped for, it must occur between the young people themselves; and it was certainly fortunate that they could not meet one another. He did not himself believe in love-making by pen and ink, his own epistolary efforts in that way having been framed with considerable caution, and an eye to possible actions for breach of promise.

In blissful ignorance of these views, Ella went her own road, as was her wont, and felt it could have but one ending. She did not even need Mr. Landon's corroboration of her view upon that subject, though in truth he did corroborate it by implication. She met him, as the phrase goes, half-way — nay, it must be confessed, three-quarters—but then he came the rest of the distance very readily. If she was flame, he was tow or touchwood, which burn, we know, with great brilliancy, though from the brevity of their incandescence they are little adapted for domestic use.

He did not put her letters into his bosom; he generally tossed them over to Darall, who at first declined to read them; but, on being assured that there was nothing private in them—"nothing catching," was Landon's phrase, "that you haven't got yourself"—and also that there was something about Gracie, which was generally the case, consented.

"You should be a happy man," sighed he, "to be beloved like that."

"Ya-as," said Landon, slowly expelling the smoke from his short pipe. These confidences took place chiefly in one of the back-yards, for the convenience of unmolested smoking, which was at that time contrary to orders. Then, seeing his friend grow grave, he added, laughing, and in his natural tone, "No, Darall, I don't pretend to be indifferent to all this incense; a puppy of that sort would not deserve to be loved at all—would deserve only to be kicked."

"So I was thinking," observed Darall, dryly.

"But it is astonishing how one gets to take these things as a matter of course."

"Does one?"

"Well, yes: this is the third note Ella has written, and it does not affect me—though it's ever so much stronger—half so much as the first."

"It is plain that this girl loves you, Landon," said the other, slowly folding up the letter; "but I am not so sure, from the symptoms you describe, that——"

"That the feeling is reciprocated, you would say. Oh, but it is, by jingo! Love her? Why, of course I love her! Who could help loving her? She is beautiful, and clever, and rich, and

very fond of me. What the deuce would you have?"

"Oh, as for me, I should not venture to hope for half as much," said Darall, still gravely.

"Well, and then she's no belongings; one has not to marry a whole family, as so often happens. There will be no mother-in-law, which is itself a great stroke of luck, and no father-in-law, though that doesn't so much signify."

"That's true," said Darall, who had not yet seen the Commissary. "Miss Mayne has been very confidential, my dear fellow, to tell you all these particulars."

"Well, she has not gone into details, which I am glad to say she seems, like me, to have no fancy for; but she says that she is absolutely her own mistress, with none but her uncle to be consulted; and then she playfully added that he is the last person in the world she should dream of consulting."

"Then you mean to say that you are already thinking seriously of marriage; you, who are not even of age yet?"

"That's no matter, the point is that the young lady is of age," observed Landon. "I hate a fellow who marries for money, but it is pleasant to find it where you have already invested your affections—not only the nest, as it were, but the

nest-egg. If it were not so, the governor might forbid the banns, and make himself very unpleasant. He hates my shirking the desk, and I have heard him express himself strongly against early marriages. A man does not know his own mind, according to him, until it is almost time for him to lose it."

"I sincerely hope you will have your father's consent before you marry," said Darall, gravely; "at least, I know if my mother were adverse to my doing so—didn't like my choice, or anything of that sort—that it would make me very miserable."

"My dear Darall, you are very easily made miserable," rejoined his friend, rattling the silver with which his pockets were generally well provided. "You should not suffer the feelings of others to affect you so much; they are to be respected, and so forth, of course. But when people cannot be persuaded into one's own view of a projected step, my notion is to give up persuading, and to take it. Then the argument is at once removed to another plane. Opposition is not to be grappled with like a nettle and crushed; this is a free country; let everyone keep his opinion; but take your own way."

"That sounds pleasant enough," said Darall, smiling.

"And it *is* pleasant, my dear fellow. The same system is to be employed with disagreeable people. Do not ruffle them by your companionship; do not rub them the wrong way—as you must do if you rub together at all—and make them hate you; but simply avoid them. If I had a disagreeable father—which I have not; the governor and I get on capitally, except on points where we agree to differ—or an objectionable mother, or an unpleasant wife, I should simply go my own way, and let them go theirs. The loss would then be on the right side."

"But, my good friend, a man can't avoid his wife; that is one of the reasons why marriage is such an important step. You have seen two pointers of different opinions coupled together, and what happens?"

"Well, the stronger always goes where he likes, and the other follows—though it is true rather unwillingly. But if you are thinking of Ella, who would wish to do anything to displease her? Is it likely that any man should be attracted elsewhere from her?"

"Indeed I should think not," said Darall; "and especially when he has won her love, as you seem to have done. Only as yet, you see, you have not known one another a week."

"In that week, my dear fellow," returned Landon, comically, "as the novelists say, we have lived a lifetime. Our future is cut and dried for us. I am not to be expelled, it seems, and her income, combined with the governor's allowance, will enable us to live in clover; it is not the case of a married sub, who has to live in barracks, with only a curtain to divide his sitting-room from his bed-room."

"But will your father make you an allowance if your marriage displeases him, as your choice of a profession has already done?"

"Well, in that event, Ella has enough for two."

"But you wouldn't like to live on your wife's money?"

"Well, a great many better men than I are quite content to do that, and think themselves very lucky. However, I hope matters will be better arranged, though I am bound to say the governor is just now a little ruffled. Sir Hercules wrote rather seriously about me. 'Your son has disgraced himself,' he said, 'but it has been decided to give him one more chance.' Now my father would in reality have been better pleased if the chance had not been given me. 'You are now about to persevere,' he writes, 'in a calling

of which I do not approve, and for which you, at the outset, have proved yourself unfitted; for my part, I am not surprised that one who has been so disobedient as a son should have shown contempt for military authority.' That was rather strong for the governor. Now your mother—excellent woman—seems to have taken a much more sensible view of the matter, though it is true Sir Hercules in your case abstained from using such bad language."

"If he had said 'disgraced,' my mother would not have believed him," said Darall, proudly.

"Of course not, that is where women are so wise; they never believe anything they don't want to believe. And that is not only judicious so far as they are concerned, but fortunate for us men."

"I am bound to say," continued Darall, earnestly, and without taking notice of this philosophical observation, "that the letter Sir Hercules sent home was a very considerate one; and I have little doubt that I am indebted for his forbearance—at all events, to some extent—to the good offices of Colonel Juxon; in other words, to you, Landon."

"Say rather to Ella, my dear fellow," returned the other gaily. "'Your friends, Cecil, will be

always my friends,' she writes, which was really very pretty of her; and, you see, she has already proved her words; you may be sure I do not love her the less on that account."

Darall held out his hand, which the other clasped. "You are a good fellow," said Darall, simply; but his thought was something more. "There is no wonder that any girl should fall in love with this man, who has such a gracious way with him, even with me. He will surely make her happy."

Friendship was one of the few sentiments in favour at the Royal Military Academy, though in Darall's case it was not wholly unmixed with envy. He envied Landon his manners; Landon, on the other hand—though, as we know, he acknowledged its goodness—did not envy Darall his heart, being tolerably well satisfied with his own. It was a notable feature in his character, and certainly added to its charm, that he was jealous of nobody.

Circulars, as we have hinted, had been already issued by the authorities concerning the cadets and their late transgression; Senior-under-officer Bex and one or two "corporals" had received their *congés,* while the rest were to have their leave stopped for the remainder of the term, and to be "severely reprimanded;"

this last operation (which most naval and military persons, especially cadets, are found to survive) had not yet taken place, and the whole corps were still under arrest until it did.

Consequently, church-parade, which necessitated the marching down to barracks, and so far a temporary enfranchisement, was looked forward to with an unwonted satisfaction. Never before had they donned shako and plume with such hilarity. All the garrison knew, of course, that the Cadet Company was in disgrace, but if remorse gnawed their young breasts, they hid it, as the Spartan did the fox, beneath a sunny smile. In church they were always merry; and when they came out of it, and were marching home with that even step—the one hundred and eighty all moving like one—for which they were so justly celebrated, you would never have supposed they were returning to a prison. On their way thither, this martial throng encountered a certain civil procession, consisting of an invalid lady in a bath-chair, propelled by a shambling ancient (the Commissary got him threepence an hour cheaper because of his weak legs), and attended by two young ladies of surpassing loveliness. The whole affair, made up as it was of such curious elements—youth and age, health and decrepitude, beauty and Jennings

(which was the name of the ancient) — had quite an allegorical effect.

"By jingo!" cried Landon to his friend, who was marching beside him. "Eyes right, man; there's Ella and Miss Ray."

CHAPTER XIII.

"POOR ELLA."

A SALUTATION was out of the question, but in default of it, Darall hung out his usual red flag. "You blush like a blonde," a cadet friend had once said to him, for which Darall, who was sensitive on some points, had knocked him down.

The next moment he received permission, demanded on his behalf by Landon, from the senior under-officer (vice Bex departed) to "fall out," and converse with friends "upon urgent private affairs."

"My dear Ella, this is most charming and unexpected," said Landon, rapturously, notwithstanding that the Cadet Company had not yet dragged its caterpillar length beyond them, and was concentrating its gaze upon his beloved object and her friend, as directly as the discipline of the Service permitted.

"Not unexpected, I should think, sir," returned she, reprovingly, "since you told me you should be in prison 'except when you marched to church on Sunday.' Well, I think Mr. Darall might have spoken to me."

"Oh, Darall's all right," said Landon, in a tone that seemed to say: "Time's precious, think of *me*;" and then his voice dropped to a whisper.

Darall could certainly not be accused of impoliteness, yet for the moment he had lost his head—"couldn't have been more abroad, old fellow, if you had been on foreign service," Landon subsequently said. The sight of Gracie, the sound of her voice, the touch of her hand, had utterly taken away his presence of mind. He had resolved never to see her again, but his eyes had hungered for her, and now that she was set before them, they devoured her.

Shy as Gracie was, she was more equal to an occasion of the kind than this young gentleman (as was only natural), and she at once introduced him to her mother.

"This is Mr. Darall, mamma, who was so good as to help Ella and me—so—so——"

"So gallantly," said the invalid, with a smile, that had once been charming, and was still gracious. "I am very glad to have the oppor-

tunity of thanking you, Mr. Darall, for your kindness to my daughter."

Landon here came up, and was formally presented to Mrs. Ray, and after some pretty speeches on all sides, drifted back to Ella, while the other two young folks walked on with the arm-chair and its occupant. The company proved so agreeable to one another—notwithstanding that the talk was neither wise nor witty—that the far-off barrack clock, striking three, was the first incident to remind them of the flight of time.

"Good gracious!" cried the invalid, "your father will be wondering what has become of you, Gracie"—she did not even pretend that he would wonder what had become of her—"and only think how tired poor Jennings must be with pushing my chair!"

"He has not been pushing it this half-hour," said Gracie, laughing; "he is sitting yonder with his pipe, and Mr. Darall has been doing his work for him."

"He looked so tired, and so doubtful of his legs, that I took the liberty," observed Darall, smiling.

"Oh! dear, dear; to think that it was you who have been pushing my chair all this time! I thought it seemed to be going very nicely.

It is certain you must be very good-natured, Mr. Darall, and not proud."

"Nay, but I *am* proud, Mrs. Ray—to have been able to be of the smallest use to you."

It was not a very good *mot*, but it showed that the young gentleman had recovered himself. As usual, he had found himself at home with his new friends, just as it was time to part with them.

"I wish," said Mrs. Ray, in hesitating tones, "that we were in a position to invite you to our house, Mr. Darall; but the fact is, I am such an invalid and my husband has such pressing duties, that we see no company."

"I hope I should not be 'company,'" said Darall softly, as he took Gracie's hand. Perhaps it was because he had such a very meagre chance of obtaining it permanently, that he now held it as long as he could. ("I thought you had taken a lease of it, old fellow," said Landon afterwards.)

"We would make no stranger of you, certainly," returned Gracie, warmly; "but the fact is, papa is rather peculiar, and except a few old friends——"

"I understand," said Darall gravely, as indeed by a certain intuition he did. "Then I

must trust to the chapter of accidents—or rather of fortunate events—to see you again."

From this it may be gathered that, if Mr. Darall had not volunteered for this forlorn hope, yet being in it, he had pushed on with considerable vigour, and behaved—very literally—with gallantry.

"Well, Gracie, you must not throw any more stones at me about short attachments," whispered Ella slyly, as the two girls were once more behind Mrs. Ray's chair, "for you and Mr. Darall have taken a glass house yourselves."

"No, dear Ella, such houses are too fragile," smiled Gracie sadly, "for such poor folks as we are. Of course, if we could—— But what's the use of wishing, when nothing can come of it. Ours is not even one of those melancholy cases in which the wise say 'Wait,' and 'Patience.' All the waiting in the world would not avail us."

"Of course not. Waiting never did," answered Ella quite gravely, as though she had tried it; "but there may be other ways."

"What others?"

"I have thought of one at least."

And when the little party had arrived within doors, and the invalid had been carried upstairs by Jennings and the Commissary's man, Ella,

with some diplomatic introduction, unfolded her plan.

"Well, my dear Mrs. Ray, and how did you like Cecil?"

"Cecil? Oh, I forgot. You mean Mr. Landon, of course—a very handsome, gentleman-like young man, I'm sure. Otherwise I could not judge, because he did not give me very much of his society, being otherwise—well—wrapped up."

"You might have said 'engaged' without indiscretion," said Ella, laughing, "for we are engaged."

"Lor', my dear; what, to-day, on the Common?"

"Why not? I told you it was about to happen," answered Ella, rather petulantly. "The Common was as good a place as anywhere, I suppose; or must that kind of thing always take place in an arbour, with spiders and things?"

"Oh dear no," said the poor lady apologetically, "not necessarily an arbour, and certainly not spiders; only I had no idea."

"The fact is, my dear Mrs. Ray," said Ella, laughing, "you were so 'wrapped up,' as you call it, with another young man, yourself, that you had neither eyes nor ears for anybody

else. I almost think it my duty to tell the Commissary."

"Oh pray don't," returned the invalid, gravely; the Commissary was much too serious a subject to be spoken of in connection with a joke. "I must say, however, I was delighted with Mr. Darall. It is not every young gentleman who would have pushed an old woman's chair for her—and on the Common too."

"The Common appears to be a crucial test with you, dear mother," said Gracie, turning to her young friend; "she has fallen in love with Mr. Darall upon it, it seems, herself."

"I do think him a very kind-hearted and good young man," said the invalid warmly.

"Then at least you do not wonder if Gracie has fallen in love with him?"

"Yes, I should wonder, Ella, because she has too much good sense," returned Mrs. Ray simply. "If she were free to choose, as you are, I don't say but that it would be welcome news to me to hear that she had chosen one like this Mr. Darall—supposing, that is, he should turn out, upon inquiry, to be as good as he seems. That beggars must not be choosers, however, is a proverb that holds good with beggar-girls especially."

There was a tone of bitterness in the poor lady's speech, which Ella rightly judged to have been evoked by the particular occasion. That Hugh Darall would never be anything more to her than a friend—and even so without the opportunities of friendship—was no doubt a source of sorrow to the poor lady. She had not been used to have civilities paid her by young men for many a year, and far less any attention.

"But if it could be done—if the young gentleman, on inquiry, should prove eligible," persisted Ella, "and Gracie should be induced to get over her present prejudice against him——"

"Oh, Ella!" remonstrated Gracie.

"Well, my notion is there must be a prejudice, or else you could never be so cool about it; if I were in your place, even if I couldn't marry Mr. Darall, I should say at once I wished I could. However, I was about to ask you, dear Mrs. Ray, not from mere curiosity, you may be sure, whether you would really like this young man for a son-in-law—whether his presence here would not be like a sunbeam—his love and care for Gracie a sight to warm your heart?"

"God bless her, yes," sighed the poor lady; "if such a thing might be, though it took her away from her old mother, I would be thankful

to see it." Yet the tears stood in her eyes the while she spoke; the blankness of her remaining span of life, without her darling, having suddenly presented itself to her view.

"Oh! but Mr. Darall will 'get the Sappers,' Cecil tells me, and they, you know, have lots of home appointments, and can live almost where they please."

This was rather a sunny view of an Engineer's career, but Ella had forgotten that Darall's profession must needs prevent him from being an inmate at Officers' Quarters, Letter Z, and that whither he went Gracie would also go.

"But even if he got the Sappers, Ella, he would never be able to keep a wife."

"Well, not at first, perhaps, without some help; and that's what I am coming to, dear Mrs. Ray. Look here now; don't let us misunderstand one another; don't let us give ourselves airs, and be proud and disagreeable; don't let us be carried away with the notion of what the world will think, or say, in the matter—for the world need never know, to begin with, and its opinion, if it did know, would be not worth having—but let us be sensible, and listen to love and reason. If your daughter is not rich, Mrs. Ray, I, who claim to be her dearest friend, have got enough for two. Singularly enough, too,

Cecil, who is Mr. Darall's dearest friend, has got enough for two also; but, as matters are not yet settled with his father, I will leave him out of the calculation; only you may be sure that whatever I may propose will have his cordial approval. Now what I do propose is, that I should be dear Gracie's fairy godmother for a year or two, till Mr. Darall becomes a major or something—and make her an allowance of say two hundred pounds a year, to be a little increased if there are any young major-minors. Now don't interrupt me, and especially don't contradict me, because that tries my temper, and my temper is not good. When the major becomes a major-general, or even before that, if he has been lucky, Gracie might begin to pay me off, and eventually get rid of the obligation. Only of course it never will be an obligation between us two. Delicacy about money between true friends is simply discreditable. I suppose if I had a large umbrella, and you had none, and it rained, you would have no scruples about sharing it; and in this case I am only offering you a very small portion of my umbrella."

Here Ella came to a pause, being out of breath from having spoken very rapidly, to prevent either of her companions striking in, as they had shown some disposition to do.

"It is very, very kind of you," began Mrs. Ray, "but——"

"Now I know you are going to try my temper," interrupted Ella. "It has been very often tried, I do assure you, and has been very much weakened by the experiments. If you only knew how very much I dislike contradiction and opposition of any kind!—My dear Mrs. Ray, you are shedding tears, which I am very glad to see; it is the white flag, that shows the fortress has capitulated. You are going to be wiser and dearer to me than ever."

And indeed it is possible that, for a brief space, the invalid has allowed herself a glimpse of happiness, such as was rare to her, except in dreams. She beheld, maybe, her daughter the wife of a man she loved, and not a mere purchased commodity; she felt the touch of a tender hand —the same that had pushed her bath-chair so deftly—and heard a gentle but manly voice calling her "mother."

"Ella," said Gracie, firmly, "you should not tempt mamma, through her great love for me, even to think of such a proposal. I will add, though the confession is most painful to me, that your offer, generous and noble as it is, is a positive cruelty to me. First, because it holds out a

happiness that is impossible of attainment; and secondly, because it credits me—and someone else—with a want of self-respect. What do you think, Mr. Darall—nay, what do you think Mr. Landon—would reply if you were to say to him, 'If you really care to marry me, Gracie has offered to maintain us'?"

"That is not a wise way of putting it, Gracie," answered Ella. The flush of generous impulse had faded from her cheek, and her voice had lost its fervour.

"I see I have offended you, darling," said Gracie, sadly, "when, Heaven knows, my heart is full of gratitude and love towards you. If I could only tell you all I feel——"

"It is unnecessary," said Ella, coldly. "The obstinacy of false pride, and the exaggerated value commonplace natures set on a few pounds sterling, are quite familiar to me."

"Ella! Ella!" exclaimed the invalid, in agitated tones, "come here, darling, and let me speak with you; lean down and listen. You are right," she whispered, "because you have spoken out of a generous heart, but Gracie is right also. She has not answered you thus upon her own account, nor yet on mine. I think, if we two were alone concerned, she would have no scruples;

indeed, we have shown that. But, Ella dear, she loves him—that is what wrings my heart—I see she loves him; and, loving him, she cannot bear to think of him consenting, or being asked to consent, to what he might think—though I should not, nor she—humiliating conditions. It was not pride that made her so resentful, but love; and therefore you, of all women, dear Ella, must needs pardon her."

"I am a fool," cried Ella, passionately, "and worse than a fool. I believe I was angry because Gracie said, 'Suppose it was Mr. Landon?' and put my case in place of hers. Am I better than she because I am richer? Heaven knows that I am not. It was a baseness——"

"No, darling, no," interrupted her friend, embracing her; "it was only that you liked no one to be compared with Mr. Landon, which was very natural."

"I say it was a baseness," repeated Ella, vehemently, "and I ask your pardon. Gracie dear, forgive me."

"I have nothing to forgive in you, dear Ella; and only a world of kindness to forget."

"Then keep your forgiveness for another time, darling; I shall need it yet. When I say hard things, you will make allowance. Remember

what we read together the other day in Shakespeare :

> " Have you not love enough to bear with me,
> When that rash humour which my mother gave me
> Makes me forgetful ? "

With a wave of her quick hand for farewell, she was gone. Mother and daughter looked at one another in hushed amaze.

" What a fiery nature, and yet what tenderness ! " exclaimed Gracie.

" So much the worse for her," rejoined the invalid, sadly. " To wound, and then to feel the wound, will be her fate. Poor Ella ! "

CHAPTER XIV.

AN "ESTEEMED FAVOUR."

It was some weeks after the battle of Charlton Fair, the incidents of which, however, were by no means forgotten, that Cecil Landon found himself, not for the first time, sitting alone with Ella in the little drawing-room of Hawthorne Lodge.

The leave of the gentlemen-cadets, as respected the Metropolis, was still stopped, but they were permitted to visit their friends in the vicinity of the Academy, and of this privilege Mr. Landon had taken the fullest advantage. If he was not exactly an honoured guest at the Lodge, neither was he there upon sufferance. The Colonel had been informed by Ella that the marriage was to be, and he had acquiesced, though with a shrug of his lean shoulders; and having gone thus far, it had been necessary to go farther

and give the young gentleman the run of the house ("and of his teeth too, confound him," added the Colonel). The sun therefore shone on one side of the hedge, that is on Ella's, brightly enough, as concerned the future prospects of the young pair; but upon Cecil's side, the sky was cloudy—the course of true love did not run, in that direction, quite as smooth. The governor—that is to say, not Sir Hercules, but his paternal parent—objected to the match with unlooked-for pertinacity.

"It is plain, my dear Ella," said the Colonel, "that this old hunks, who has the atrocious taste not to wish you to be his daughter-in-law, has a pig's head. He is a man to stick to his point: he is standing right in your road, with his four legs planted, like a beast that has been too heavily laden. I have seen 'em at it in Spain. It is astounding to me, that you should consider it consistent with your dignity to endeavour to move the animal."

"I would do anything, Uncle Gerard, short of giving up dear Cecil, to prevent his quarrelling with his father."

There was a certain significance as well as determination in this reply, which the Colonel thoroughly understood and resented.

"You will take your own way, of course,"

answered he bitterly; "you would not be yourself if you didn't."

"I shall take my own way this time, uncle, because I am quite sure it is the right way."

"Which means that you have found out quite a new reason for doing as you please," snapped out the Colonel.

"You have almost made an epigram, Uncle Gerard," was Ella's quiet reply, "and with a little cultivation——" But the Colonel had cut her short by leaving the room and banging the door.

Ella had persuaded Cecil to write a propitiatory reply to his father's very unpromising epistle, and that morning had brought a second letter from the City.

"Well, dear, it is 'veto,' I see," said Ella, cheerfully, after that salutation of lips and cheek which will outlast all forms and ceremonies.

"Yes, indeed; it is very much 'veto.' He has received, he says, my 'esteemed favour,' yet has only to refer me to his 'communication of the 14th ult.'"

"What a funny old gentleman he must be!" cried Ella, clapping her hands and laughing.

"Well, I call it gibberish," said Cecil, gloomily; "and upon my word, Ella, I don't see

the fun of it. If he won't make me any allowance——"

"We must make some for him," interrupted Ella, brightly. "You can't expect 'parties' in the City to sympathise with the ardour of love. You and your father evidently don't understand one another. You want some unprejudiced person—like myself—to place this matter before him in its proper light."

"You don't know the governor," observed Cecil, simply.

"At present it is true I have not that honour, except by letter—addressed by a third person; but I intend to know him; and his letters charm me. Now, let me look at his '14th ult.' There's a military curtness about that, by-the-bye, which should please Uncle Gerard: 'Of this young lady' (that's me), he writes, 'I know nothing, but am willing to believe all you say.' (Well, I call that very nice of him.) 'Her family may very likely have the bluest blood in all England; though I should not put that down as an advantage: it appears to me that health must have been sacrificed, for some generations, in the attainment of the colour.'"

Ella leant back in her chair, and sent forth

peal after peal of silvery laughter. Cecil sat with a frown on his brow, and stroking the down on his upper lip, which was within a very few years of becoming a moustache. "It is surprising to me that you don't see the fun of that," said she. "'This is a subject, my dear boy, upon which I am in a position to offer an opinion.' Why what does he mean by that? You never read that out to me, Cecil; why should this dear old gentleman be a judge of colour?"

"Well, the fact is," stammered Landon, "it's in a very large wholesale way, and of course it's nothing to be ashamed of—but my father is a dyer."

Here Ella gave quite a little scream of delight, and the tears fairly rolled down her beautiful cheeks in her exuberant mirth. "The idea of your not having told me that, Cecil."

"I didn't think it of any importance; at least I hoped it would be of none."

"It is of the utmost importance—to the joke, my dear. And I wouldn't have him anything but a dyer for worlds. 'It is no doubt a matter of congratulation to herself that this young lady has money; but you, with your fine views of honour and chivalry, would scarcely marry her, I suppose, if you had none; and you will not have a penny if you do marry her.'

I like his straightforward way of putting the matter."

"I don't," said Cecil, decisively.

"There you are wrong, my darling, for it shows your father has common sense, and will listen to reason. 'I object, as you know, to the military profession, and Miss Mayne's connections would be very distasteful to me.' There again, dear Cecil, your father shows his sense: his fine intuition, you see, has already pictured to him Uncle Gerard."

"Upon my word, Ella, you seem to me to have taken up the cudgels for my father against ourselves."

"Not at all, my darling, but I am trying to put myself in his place; and in the meantime, I own, I'm rapidly falling in love with him. 'I will take your word for it that she is "the most beautiful girl the sun ever shone upon."' Oh dear!"

"So you are," said Cecil, tenderly. Here was a little interval—what the playwrights call "a carpenter's scene"—uninteresting to spectators, and only indirectly tending to the development of the plot, but very conscientiously enacted.

"'Her beauty, however, is nothing to me,'" continued Ella, "'nor her youth neither.' Well,

I'm sure—or rather I'm not sure ; for, you know, he hasn't seen me. 'She may be as young as she pleases.' Well, that again is considerate, and I hope you will always allow me the same privilege ; 'but it is *your* being so young on which I base my objection ; you are as yet a mere boy, with your judgment quite unfit for so serious a step as matrimony. It is impossible you can know your own mind, much less that of this young woman. You have a strong will, it is true ; indeed you have always placed it in opposition to your father's wishes—but that does not show judgment, but the want of it. In choosing your profession you have got your own way ; in choosing your wife—at all events for some years to come—I will have mine ; and you will not marry Miss Mayne, and I will have no more words about it.' He has certainly a very perspicuous style. 'I beg to remain (just as you behave) your affectionate father,

"'BART. LANDON.'

"Why he is funny to the last, Cecil. What does he mean by 'Bart.'? You are not concealing from me, I hope, that he is a baronet?"

"Bart. is short—or at all events *his* short—for Bartholomew. It's the way he always signs his cheques—of which," added Landon, doggedly, "I expect I shall never see another."

"There are worse things than not getting cheques, dear Cecil," said Ella, gravely.

"Um," said Cecil, a little incredulously.

"Oh yes," continued she with earnestness, "to lose the esteem and affection of him from whom they are naturally due, is worse than to lose money. To know that a great gulf is fixed —no matter whether it is of your own digging or his—between yourself and the author of your being."

"My dear Ella, I don't quarrel with the governor; but I honestly tell you I think I could survive a quarrel with him, if I had you to comfort me for the calamity."

"That might not be a lasting comfort, Cecil, while your remorse would last, till, perhaps, the day came when you heard that he was dead, and past all reconciling. Don't let us talk of it, don't let us think of such a misfortune."

Her tone was no longer light, her face no longer radiant; she spoke not only sadly, but with a certain sternness which seemed strange, considering their mutual relation.

"Well, it's no use preaching, Ella, we have made up our minds to marry, have we not?"

"I can answer for myself, dear Cecil," said she, quickly; "but are you quite sure—— ?"

"Yes, yes!" cried he, interrupting her with

a caress; "I will do anything to oblige the governor—anything—except give my darling up."

"You mean that—upon your honour?" asked Ella, earnestly.

"Of course I mean it," said Landon, a little stiffly; "I am a man of my word, I hope."

"I know you are in general, darling, but I thought you might make an exception with a young lady," said Ella, simply. "Uncle says men often do. Well, I have a plan in my head; I think I see my way. Now, suppose I were to send him my picture?"

"Your picture? You silly puss. He doesn't care for pictures of such as you, nor even for the originals. No, Ella, it is very good of you, who have no governor of your own to appease, to be so solicitous that I should keep in with mine, but it will all be useless. I know him too well not to be sure of that. That letter of his is final. And now I must be off to my duties. They have made me an acting corporal on probation, and I must not be a naughty boy. With good conduct and a little luck I shall join the 'practical class' next term with Darall, and get my commission in six months, and then—then we shall be married, darling."

"That will be nearly ten months in all," sighed Ella; "why I shall be twenty-two!"

"Yes, but I don't mind marrying an old woman," laughed Landon; "and I doubt whether the Board of Ordnance will annihilate time and space—in the way of my exceptional promotion—to make two lovers happy. Of course I should like to marry you to-morrow, but I am not sure it isn't contrary to the Academy regulations to do such a thing."

"I should certainly not dream of marrying a cadet," said Ella, pouting, "even if the regulations enjoined it."

"The announcement would certainly look funny in the newspaper," continued Landon, comically: "'On the 14th ult.' (as the governor puts it), 'Gentleman-cadet Cecil Landon, to Ella, daughter of the late, &c. &c. &c.' I should think it would upset all your uncle's notions of discipline. The idea seems to shock you yourself, darling. What is the matter?"

"Nothing; only a passing shiver; the air is getting a little cold. Good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye, my precious, and take care of yourself." He closed the window, before he left the room, to shut out the evening air, but it was not cold that had made Ella shiver. Now she was alone, her face was no longer gay, but grave and pinched; she put her heavy hair back with her hands, and pressed them to her temples,

gazing the while before her, with that awed yet eager look with which poor mortals are apt to contemplate their future. "I had forgotten the newspapers," she murmured. "I must see to that. It must be kept out of the newspapers."

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE LIFT.

On the morning after her interview with Cecil, Ella called on her friends at Letter Z. They had both altered in appearance, and for the worse, since we met them last, some few weeks ago. A few weeks, a few days even, will make a difference in one in the sad case of Mrs. Ray. The one strand that held her to her life was the love of her daughter, and if her remaining in this world would have benefited Gracie, she would have been willing to prolong her stay; but she felt herself to be a burthen, gladly borne indeed, but still a useless weight even to her. She had lived and loved in her time, not wisely, nor yet well; she had married, as we know, neither wisely nor well; but since our story is not of her, there is no need here to account for it. Suffice

it to say that where she had loved she had found Falsehood, and where she had married, Misery. She was weak and far from wise—except where bitter experience too late had taught her wisdom; and life had gone very, very hard with her from first to last.

There is a comfortable notion among comfortable people, that everybody has sooner or later his or her share of good fortune in the world; if that be so, Mrs. Ray was the exception that proves the rule; and the woman whose fate was to restore the average must have been born under a lucky star. The poor lady had a smile, however, for others still, and welcomed Ella with it as usual.

"You are very early, dear, this morning—though you cannot be too early, you know, in our house."

"I always come to you when I want to be spoilt, dear Mrs. Ray, and I want to be spoilt to-day, very particularly. I have a great favour to ask of you; I want you to lend me Gracie for the whole morning."

"You are very welcome to her, because you always make her happy, my dear Ella."

"But this is a free country," said Gracie, "and I am not going to be disposed of in this summary manner. Mamma is less well than

usual to-day, Ella," she whispered hurriedly. "Don't press it."

"It is not any scheme of pleasure I have to propose," said Ella, answering both her companions in one reply. "It is an important matter that concerns only myself. But if to-morrow, or the next day, will be more convenient——"

"Gracie has no pressing engagements that I know of. One day is very like another to her," said Mrs. Ray, with a little sigh.

"And why should it not be, mamma?" replied Gracie, quickly, with that smooth of her mother's hair that had more significance, and conveyed more, than the touch of any mesmerist. "One would think, to hear you talk, that I had a raging thirst for excitement."

"You are young, Gracie, and must needs have the tastes of youth, although they are so seldom gratified. Take her away, Ella, by all means; and if you can put a little colour into her cheeks——"

"I am going to take her to the very place for it," said Ella, laughing; "but that must be a secret till she comes back again. Now do as your mother tells you, and go and put on your things, Gracie—your very smartest things—for we are going to London."

"My darling is looking ill, Ella, don't you

think so ?" inquired the invalid, nervously, when Gracie left the room.

"She is looking pale, and a little thin," said Ella; "but the weather has been very depressing."

"The weather did not affect me when I was her age, dear. Oh, Ella—we have only a moment together—it is so difficult to get you alone, for her affection makes her cling to me like my shadow, and I want to say so much; I am very miserable about her. It was not your fault; you did it all for the best in getting Mr. Darall to meet us on the Common; but Gracie has never been herself since. I fear—I fear that she has lost her heart to him."

"It is in good and honest keeping, at all events," said Ella, quietly. "But this is quite new to me."

"No doubt it is; she would be much annoyed if she knew I had told you. When an attachment is hopeless, no girl likes to speak of it except to her mother."

"You astound me, dear Mrs. Ray. It was so with me, I confess; but that meeting with Mr. Darall once or twice, should, in Gracie's case—who is all propriety—have proved so serious——"

"Nay, but they have met since then; he has been here, to this house; and had a long talk with Gracie."

"Oh, indeed," smiled Ella. "I like Mr. Darall for that; I confess I had thought him just a little, what one calls in a woman, prudish."

"He is one of ten thousand for all goodness," replied Mrs. Ray, with warmth; "it is not necessary to waste words on that point. And our loss—that is, Gracie's loss—is all the greater."

"But is it certain loss? I do not again renew an offer which I have seen to be ill-judged; but can nothing be done?"

"Mr. Darall has seen my husband," said Mrs. Ray, with a little groan.

Ella's sense of humour was very keen, and she restrained a smile with difficulty. She understood that an introduction to the Commissary must have been very formidable to an intending son-in-law.

"Then you suppose that what was said was final?"

"My dear, of course it was. When my husband means that anyone is not to call again, he gives him to understand as much; and dear Mr. Darall is so sensitive. I am very sorry for him; but of course I am more sorry for Gracie. He is so honest and good; and somehow I had almost begun to hope against hope, that my husband might have seen something in him that would have compensated for his want of means.

I had ventured to indulge myself—though I must have been mad to do it—in the idea that when I was dead and gone, Gracie would have had somebody leal and true, who would have made her life a happy one."

"Don't weep, Mrs. Ray, I can't bear it," cried Ella, passionately. "You make me abhor the—the people that make you weep. Everything—everything seems wrong in the world when I see grief oppressing you, upon whom Fate has laid so heavy a hand already. You say 'when you are gone,' as if you were going for a drive; or else I could not bear to speak of it; but, as it is, let me promise you this, that when God, who wipes away all tears, has taken you to Himself, Gracie will have a friend in me, always, always, and a home with me if she will accept of it."

"Oh, Ella, you are goodness itself!"

"No, dear Mrs. Ray, I am nothing of the kind; if you knew me as I am, you would know otherwise. I am—but no matter. I am good for this at all events. If the way can be made smooth between Gracie and Darall, I will do it; and if not, your Gracie will possess her soul in patience in safe hands."

The invalid lifted up her own in mute thanksgiving, and ere she could reply her daughter had re-entered the room.

"I am afraid I have been an unconscionable time, Ella."

"It has not, at all events, been misspent, my dear, to judge by the result."

"It is your dress," said Gracie, simply, "the one you sent me to replace that one——"

Here her voice began to fail; she had inadvertently touched on tender ground.

"I was not referring to the dress," laughed Ella. "I will not keep Gracie long, dear Mrs. Ray; and when she returns, you will be rewarded for the loan of her, by hearing all our adventures."

"I have been rewarded already," whispered the invalid, as Ella took her leave. "You have made me—oh, so happy!"

"My mother always looks better for a visit from you, Ella," observed Gracie, as the two girls walked towards the steamboat. "And now, may I ask, where are you going to take me?"

"To No. 10, Wethermill Street, City," answered Ella, referring to a memorandum.

"But who lives there, my dear?"

"A dyer. That is why I said it was the very place for you to get a colour."

"But, my dear Ella, are we not a little smart for that kind of shopping? Won't there

be vats about and flapping things on poles?" and she looked down at her new dress, the texture and tint of which were delicate.

"I don't know, I'm sure, Gracie. The fact is, I'm going to call upon my papa-in-law that is to be. He is a little rusty about Cecil's marriage, and I am going to oil him."

"My dear Ella, but does he know you're coming?"

"Certainly not; nobody knows it except you and me. We are going to be two 'delightful surprises' to him. He writes that it is nothing to him that girls should be young or beautiful. That's all nonsense; it's a great deal to him, and to all mankind. My notion is—though it is quite crude as yet, and subject to your better judgment—that we should each pretend to be the other. Then he will snub you (thinking you to be Cecil's young woman), and fall in love with me; after which matters will be easy. What do you think of the idea?"

"My dear Ella, it is not to be entertained for a moment. What? Pass under a false name——"

"Well, and what harm is there in that?" interrupted Ella, brusquely. "It is not forgery, I suppose? Many excellent people have con-

cealed their own identity before now, and for the best of reasons."

"It may be so, Ella; but I really should not like to do it myself."

They walked on towards the steamboat-pier in silence. Ella's face had grown suddenly so white and hard, that poor Gracie's speech was frozen by it.

"I am so sorry to disoblige you, dear," at last she stammered; "I hope I have not offended you by my refusal."

"By your refusal, no," returned Ella; "but I don't like such scruples. They seem to me, to say the least of them, priggish. However, let us say no more about it. Here's the boat. Gracie dear," continued she, as soon as they got on board, "come down into the cabin."

"The cabin!" Nothing can be more unattractive, even on a wet day, than the so-called "saloon" of a Woolwich steamboat; but on a fine day like the present, why Ella should have wished to visit its dust and gloom was inexplicable to Gracie. However, she followed her friend's footsteps down the stairs. No sooner had she reached the bottom than she found herself, almost to her alarm, in the other's embrace.

"I couldn't kiss you before all those people,

or tell you how sorry I was to have shown such temper."

"You were a little 'over earnest with your Brutus,' darling," answered Gracie, laughing; "that was all."

It was not Gracie's way at all to act the part of mentor, and certainly not to Ella, yet she could not help adding: "Such a kiss more than makes up for everything, darling; but surely, surely, it is wrong to allow yourself to be so easily put out."

"Of course it's wrong, my dear," answered Ella gaily, "and it's not pleasant, like most things that are wrong. But at all events that storm is over; let us enjoy the sunshine—and the open air."

And so she chatted on, in the brightest spirits, until they reached London, nor, even when they had entered their cab, and were driving eastward upon the errand that must needs be so momentous to herself, did she show any sign of anxiety or doubt. To Gracie, who expressed her wonder at such presence of mind, she said: "It is because I don't think about it at all; in my complete ignorance of how I shall be received, it is better to leave things to the chapter of accidents. Cecil, who knows nothing of this expedition, however, has uncon-

sciously buoyed the channel a little, and told me some things about his father which give me hope. He is obstinate, but very good-natured: just, and fond of a joke. These are kindly elements. If he is a little bit vulgar—which between you and me is probable—I will take care he shall not relish our visit less on that account; and if he is really chivalrous, we are sure of him"

"You mean to say, you are sure of his not turning us out of the house, Ella; not of gaining your point with him."

"The one includes the other. '*Veni, vidi, vici*;' if I see him he is done for."

"Oh, Ella, you would not be so courageous if you did not know that you were sure of your lover in any case."

"That is true, Gracie; I am sure of Cecil." The look of triumph faded from her face, as she marked the cloud upon that of her friend, and called to mind Mrs. Ray's words. She was not one of those who enjoy their own prosperity the more because of the lack of it in others.

"It is not a cheerful place, this City, is it?" said Ella, looking out upon the sombre street with its eager crowds of business men, so unlike in visage the pleasure-seekers of the West. "I don't wonder Cecil 'shied' at it, as he calls

it, and 'bolted out of the course.' Dear me, this is Wethermill Street, I suppose."

The cab had stopped before a huge building, with a broad flight of steps, up and down which a stream of men were hurrying.

"Are they all come to be dyed, I wonder?" interrupted Ella.

"Oh, Ella, how can you? my heart is all of a flutter. How rich Mr. Landon must be to have such a house of business."

"This is not all his; it is a great block of offices of which he rents one of the floors. Look at the names written on the wall, 'Landon and Son'—that was Cecil's grandfather and *his* son—'third floor'; and a hand—let us take that hand for a good omen; he holds his hand out to me already, you see."

The hand pointed to a doorway on the left, which led into an empty room with high walls, and a great hole where half the ceiling should have been.

"My dear Ella, what is this? It looks like a well; Mr. Landon cannot live here."

"Yes, he does; a well is the very place for him, since Cecil says he is truth itself. Here is a bell, and the legend 'Ring the Bell' under it; so far things seem very easy."

Ella rang the bell; a whistle was heard and

down through the hole in the ceiling, and just fitting into it, came a huge box, of the height of the room, with a wooden bench in it.

"This is like the 'Arabian Nights,' is it not, Gracie? Don't be afraid; this must be the new contrivance of which Cecil told me, called 'a lift.' We must take our seats upon the bench."

"I would rather walk up if it were five hundred steps," said Gracie, hesitatingly.

"So would I, but they are whistling for us. 'Whistle and I'll come to you, my lad, though father and mother and all should go mad.' That is an invitation, you know, I am just now bound to obey, my dear."

With a bright smile she took her place in the lift, and Gracie followed just as it began to ascend.

"This is terrible!" gasped Gracie, as they presently found themselves in darkness; "it is worse than the diving-bell at the Polytechnic."

"But there's a floor to it, luckily for the two ascending belles," returned Ella; "and here's light."

There was a flash of it as they flew past the first storey; then another on the second; and at the third the machine stopped. The two girls found themselves in a bare room like that below, which opened on a sort of passage, in which,

however, was a desk, with a clerk behind it; and beyond it a huge apartment filled with desks and clerks, the latter of whom looked up to a man at the rustle of the young ladies' dresses. The clerk in the passage put his pen behind his ear by way of polite salutation, and gazed at them with astonished looks. He was almost as nervous as they were, for visitors of the female sex were unknown in the third storey, and he knew that his fellow-clerks behind him would make their criticisms upon how he acquitted himself.

"We wish to see Mr. Landon, senior," said Ella, addressing this gentleman in low but distinct tones.

"There is no Mr. Landon, junior—at least in the firm," explained the clerk.

Ella felt herself growing crimson, partly with confusion at having inadvertently alluded to Cecil, partly with indignation that he should be thus ignored.

"We wish to see Mr. Bartholomew Landon," said she, with dignity.

"Upon business, madam?"

"Yes, upon business."

"Would you favour me with your name."

"That would be of no use; I am a stranger to him."

"I am afraid — indeed I am sure — Mr. Landon would decline to see anybody unless he —that is you—perhaps, madam, you would permit me to take in your card."

"Gracie, have you your card-case with you," whispered Ella, rapidly, "with one of your father's cards in it?" Ella knew her friend was accustomed to leave them at people's houses for the Commissary, whose forte did not lie in fulfilling polite obligations of any kind.

Gracie handed the case to Ella, who selected a card and handed it to the clerk.

"Acting - Deputy - Assistant - Commissary - General Ray," muttered he, looking from one to the other in astonishment. It was unusual in those days for women to take a prominent part in official life—even by deputy and in the Commissariat.

"Please to walk this way, ladies;" the clerk opened the door upon the right, and ushered them into a small waiting-room, in which he left them.

"So far, so good!" exclaimed Ella, triumphantly.

"When he hears we are two young ladies, however, I believe he will decline to see us," said Gracie, looking very much as if she hoped he would.

"The clerk won't dare to tell him; I read

cowardice in his eye; and the old gentleman is a Tartar, I understand, in what are delicately termed his 'business relations.' No, he will expect to see the Commissary."

"Oh! good gracious!"

"Well, I don't wish to pay an extravagant compliment to ourselves at the expense of your father, but I think Mr. Landon ought to be reconciled to the disappointment. Pray don't look so frightened, Gracie; it is most important to appear at our ease. What a queer little room this is, and what furniture!—three chairs, an almanack, and a mineralogical cabinet; see what pretty colours, it can't be mineralogy; it's dyes—the blue one is indigo; and that's about all I know about them. I don't wonder Cecil feels such little interest in——"

"Ladies, your humble servant," said a sharp but not ill-humoured voice.

Gracie gave a little scream, and Ella an elaborate curtsy. Before them, with his hand upon the door, as though to make sure of his escape, stood a stout, elderly man in a drab Welsh wig. He had the Commissary's card in his hand, and looked from one to the other of his visitors out of a pair of screwed-up eyes, the expression of which it was difficult to gather. You could not even tell whether he was frowning,

for his spectacles were pushed up on his forehead. His iron-gray eyebrows, however, were very bushy, which gave him a formidable appearance, and his face was puckered up with smiles in the wrong place—wrinkles.

"I understood from this card that your business was about some Government contract—but your sex——"

"We did come about a contract, sir," interrupted Ella, in a tone in which timidity and drollery were strangely blended; "but it is not a Government one."

"Very good; provided the parties are responsible, it is nothing to me whom they employ as their agents. Pray be seated, ladies."

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH GRACIE'S CHARACTER IS DISCOVERED AND DEFINED.

The old gentleman released his hold upon the door, and, drawing his chair between the two young ladies, in a very sociable manner, touched his right ear, as an intimation that that was his best one, and placed it, as it were, at Ella's disposal. It was almost as bad as having an ear-trumpet offered one, the effect of which, upon the unaccustomed mind, is paralysis of the tongue; and, considering that Ella was already at her wits' end as to how to introduce her subject, the situation was certainly an embarrassing one.

"These are the specimens of dyes," observed the old gentleman, touching the cabinet on the table, and speaking in anything but the tone of a Tartar—"more like a wicked old Turk," as

Gracie afterwards declared. No doubt his object was to set both his visitors at their ease, but his attentions were certainly most devoted to Ella. "The colours are very brilliant, are they not; this scarlet, for instance?"

"I don't care for scarlet," said Ella.

"Well now, that's curious," observed the old fellow, "for I don't care for scarlet either."

"It reminds me of poppies and soldiers," continued Ella, "and I prefer something useful."

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Landon, "those are quite my sentiments; but in your case —being a young lady—I am surprised——"

Here was a knock at the door, and the clerk of the passage pushed his head in, with, "Mr. Villette to see you, sir."

"I will be with him in five minutes or so; ask him to wait—And what is your opinion, miss, as to colours?" inquired Mr. Landon, turning sharply upon Gracie, and regarding her not without considerable interest, though she at once assumed the tint to which he had so decided an objection.

"Well, I think the blue," said Gracie, at a venture.

"Um, that's not my colour," returned the old gentleman, in dissatisfied tones. "What's your favourite, my—I mean, Miss Ray?" And this

time he turned his eyes, not his ear, to Ella, quite briskly.

"I am not Miss Ray, Mr. Landon; that is Miss Ray."

"Indeed? I should have thought you were the elder. Well, now, which is the dye you—no, I don't mean that, of course—but what is the tint out of all these that you prefer?"

Ella looked at the cabinet with a pretence of great attention, and with an aspiration of genius suggested by the Welsh wig, exclaimed: "Drab. It's not a striking colour, of course; but it wears well, and that's the main point."

"You are the most sensible young woman I have met for years!" cried the old gentleman, admiringly. "Your choice does you infinite honour, for it suggests good common sense. You're an excellent little housekeeper, I'll warrant."

"I hope to be one soon, sir," said Ella, demurely.

"Oh, dear me; then somebody's a lucky dog," said the old gentleman, roguishly.

"He has a good father, sir, which is certainly something to be thankful for."

"Egad, that's news to hear nowadays," ejaculated the old fellow with a harsh laugh. "My own experience is that sons care deuced

little about their fathers, or their fathers' wishes, and are grateful for nothing that is done for them. It's all take and no give with them—not even thanks."

"Perhaps they are sometimes misunderstood," said Gracie, timidly, conscious of having done little up to this point to further her friend's interest, and thinking she had found her opportunity.

"There's no misunderstanding at all about it, miss!" cried the old gentleman, furiously. "It's flat 'I won't,' 'I sha'n't.' When a tom-cat flies in your face, you don't talk of his misunderstanding."

"I would never marry a man who flew in his father's face," observed Ella, decisively.

"Quite right, quite right, my dear," said the old gentleman, approvingly. "However, this is not business, and I have very little time to spend, even in such charming society."

He set his wig straight, which had been pushed a little awry, when Ella and he leant over the cabinet together, and his voice became suddenly hard and metallic. "It is very strange that you young ladies should have been commissioned to treat; but who are the parties? What do they want? Do I know their names?"

"Yes, Mr. Landon, you know their names."

"I thought so; otherwise the proceeding would have been most unusual. 'Ray, Ray;' your name is not familiar to me."

"That is Miss Ray, sir; I am no relation, only an intimate friend. My name is Ella Mayne."

"Why, that's the girl my son is making a fool of himself about!" cried the old gentleman, rising from his seat and speaking very angrily. "You said you were come about a contract." Yet even then he turned and scowled at Gracie, not at Ella.

"Yes, sir; but it was a marriage contract," murmured Ella, demurely. "I came to assure you that I could not become your son's wife without your approbation. He is not so disobedient as you imagine. He will do anything—anything to please you."

"Such as giving up Miss Mayne?" snapped the old gentleman; "well, let him begin with that then."

"Well, no, sir, he thought of beginning his new course of obedience and duty by giving up his present profession, which is as distasteful to me as it is to you, and coming into partnership, or to assist you in your business in any way you thought proper."

"Are you sure of this, young woman?"

"He has passed his word to me, sir, to that

effect. I have used my influence, such as it is, to persuade him to this course; and if you are still obdurate as regards our marriage, I shall at least have had the satisfaction of having reconciled to a loving father—for I am sure you do love him dearly, as he loves you—the man I love best in the world."

"There seems to be a deal of loving in you, Miss Ella," sneered the old man, but there was a tenderness mingled with the sneer which took away half its sting. "You are a couple of babies, you and he: mere babies. In your case, indeed, it doesn't make so much difference. I don't object to youth in women——"

"If you please, sir," said the clerk, looking in again, "Mr. Villette says——"

"Go to the devil," roared the old gentleman; and the obedient clerk incontinently fled, and was beheld no more.

"I say, Miss Ella, that my son is a mere boy at school."

"It is true he is at present but a gentleman-cadet," urged Ella, "but he may be a member of your house to-morrow, if you choose to make him so. It would be a great position, but I am not asking it on my own account, dear Mr. Landon. If I could have brought myself to be the cause of a breach between you and Cecil, there would

have been no material obstacles to our union. I have twenty-eight thousand pounds of my own, and perhaps if that were added to his capital in business——"

"No, Miss Ella, no," interrupted the old man with dignity. "Our house is in want of no woman's money. That would be settled on you and the children, that is supposing—no, no, I don't mean that"—for the two young ladies were cochineal—"I mean supposing I were ever brought to consent to this marriage."

"Oh, sir, I think you *have* consented," exclaimed Gracie, pleadingly.

"I have done nothing of the kind, Miss—Miss what's-your-name?" replied the old gentleman very irritably. "Girls have no business to think, nor boys either. It is their fathers who should think for them: but I daresay your father doesn't open his mouth in his own house."

At this fancy picture of the Commissary, Ella, afraid to laugh, experienced all the premonitory signs of suffocation, and even Gracie, though very much alarmed, could not restrain a smile.

"Yes," he went on, "to you, and such as you, miss, I fear filial obedience is only a matter for jesting. Whereas in the case of your friend Miss Ella, here—though I have a bone to pick with her still, and don't intend to forgive her yet

by any means; and have not given in at all, mind that, or promised my consent in any way to her union with my son—in her case, I say, I will answer for her, that she has at least shown herself to be a good daughter. That she is submissive and tractable, and obeys as well as loves her father—— Bless my soul, what's the matter with her?"

Ella's dark face—for though so beautiful it was very dark, being almost of Spanish hue—had grown pale to the very lips.

"She has lost her father, Mr. Landon," whispered Gracie.

"Then why didn't you tell me so before?" snapped the old gentleman; poor Gracie, it seemed, was always doomed to excite his ire. "Your neglect, you see, has caused me to give her pain. It is not, however, given to the memory of every father to excite such emotion. Ella, my dear, since you have shown yourself so good a daughter, I have almost a mind to say—if this son of mine is really prepared to listen to reason, and to put his shoulder to the wheel of commerce at once—that I will accept you for my daughter-in-law. I owe you something for having brought the tears to your pretty eyes."

"I shed no tears, sir," said Ella, in that

hard, almost defiant tone, with which her friend was by this time not wholly unfamiliar, though its strangeness never failed to strike her.

"Well, if you didn't cry, you lost your colour; and that showed me, you know, there was something amiss in the fabric — I mean that I touched upon a tender string. I say if you'll bring Cecil here, a penitent, and prepared to obey my wishes, we may all three, perhaps, go into partnership together—he with me, and you with him."

"Dear Mr. Landon, how good you are!" exclaimed Ella, the colour returning to her cheeks in a sudden flush, and the lovelight sparkling in her eyes.

"Yes, how good you are!" echoed Gracie, trembling with delight at her friend's success.

"I daresay," answered the old gentleman, sardonically; "I am afraid, Miss Ray, you are one of those young ladies who think every man good whom you have succeeded in twisting round your little finger. I feel I have been made a fool of, but I know which of you has done it. It would never have entered into Ella's head—of that I am convinced—to play such a trick upon me."

"Well, really," began Gracie, her gentle nature moved by a justifiable indignation—

then she stopped, feeling that it was Ella's part to defend her from so unfounded an accusation.

"Well, you see, dear Mr. Landon," said Ella gravely, "it was only natural that Gracie should interest herself in her friend's happiness."

"Aye, I see," said the old gentleman. "In other words, your friend is a born match-maker; well, that is a weakness which she inherits in common with nineteen-twentieths of her sex, so we will say no more about it; and now, since the contract is arranged—you rogues!—there is nothing more to be done except to sign and seal." Whereupon he kissed them both.

"There!" cried he triumphantly, while Ella laughed, and Gracie looked rather resentful (though none the less pretty on that account), "if I have been deceived, I have got something out of the transaction. I have now no more time to waste, so you must both be off; and mind, Ella, I have a line from Cecil by the second post to-morrow. There is only one thing I am afraid you will object to——"

"There is nothing, dear Mr. Landon," interrupted Ella, softly, "if you only say you wish it."

"Well, I don't know," said the old gentleman, screwing his eyes up tighter than ever,

and with his face in a thousand puckers, "if my son does intend to take to business, I should like him to become domestic also; and as soon as possible. This marriage of yours must come off immediately."

"Since it is to oblige you, dear Mr. Landon," answered Ella, demurely.

"There, get along with you both," interrupted the old gentleman with a grin; "and if ever that fool Withers admits ladies again into my waiting-room, I'll have him drowned in an indigo vat."

With that he opened the door, and dismissed his visitors with a curt nod (for the benefit of Mr. Withers), such as he was wont to use when parting with business clients.

The next moment Ella and Gracie found themselves in the lift, descending smoothly, and clasped in each other's arms.

"You are the most wonderful girl that ever was," whispered Gracie, admiringly.

"And you are the best, my darling. I am afraid my papa-in-law, that is to be, was very rude to you."

"Well, he was—rather," said Gracie, candidly. "The very sight of me, or, at all events, any word I ventured to speak, seemed to have the same effect on him as a red rag on a bull."

"Well, you see, he doesn't like scarlet," said Ella, the remembrance of her fortunate choice of colours striking her very comically. "The fact is, you were the — what-do-you-call-'em?— the man who waves the flag and enrages the animal; while I was the matador who brings him down. The fact is, he was irritated at our little deception—well, at my deception, then, if you prefer to call it so—and not liking to be angry with me, he gave you the whole benefit of his indignation. He wouldn't have kissed you, you know," she added slyly, "if he hadn't liked you."

"I thought that very impertinent," said Gracie, gravely; and then she gave expression to the opinion above mentioned, that the character of Mr. Landon, senior, was of a Turkish type.

Ella, full of high spirits, had almost remarked, "Never mind, Gracie, I will not tell Mr. Darall," but fortunately she restrained herself, and substituted for that observation: "Oh, it is only his way, and I confess I like it immensely."

"I don't like it at all," said Gracie, still ruffled by the indignity.

"Then consider you have suffered for my sake, my darling."

"I am not sure I would go through it again, even for that," returned Gracie, laughing aloud, however, in spite of herself.

"He did 'scrub,'" said Ella, thoughtfully. "Now, Cecil——"

"For shame," said Gracie; "I won't hear anything about it."

But both the young ladies laughed very pleasantly for all that, so that the cab in which they drove through Wethermill Street was likened by a young City wit to a musical-box on wheels. By the time they had reached the steamboat-pier, however, they had got very grave again in discussing Ella's future.

"By-the-bye, I suppose," said Gracie, suddenly, "Mr. Cecil Landon has quite made up his mind as to leaving the army, and taking to a commercial life?"

"Well, he knows nothing of the proposition at present," returned Ella, quietly.

"But, oh Ella, how can you be sure?"

"Well, Cecil is very good, my dear; that of course he is in the usual acceptation of the term, but also in the sense in which his father said men were good in your eyes." And she imitated the winding of floss silk upon her little finger.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DEAD LIFT.

On the evening of the visit of the two young ladies, Cecil looked in at Hawthorne Lodge as usual, having obtained leave from Sir Hercules to do so at the request of Colonel Juxon, who had been urged to use his influence to that end by Ella—which is the House-that-Jack-built system in vogue everywhere where interest is made.

One of the effects of it was to bring Mr. Cecil Landon under the governor's eye without reference—which was hitherto unprecedented—to his crimes and peccadilloes ; and the consequence was that the old warrior somewhat "cottoned" to the young fellow, and repented of the opinion that he had formed to his prejudice. There was a certain bright audacity—even his enemies had no worse name for it than an "agreeable impu-

dence"—about Cecil, which took the fancy of most men, and still more of women.

"If the lad had a little more sense of discipline," Sir Hercules had observed to the Colonel —whom we should say, however, he imagined to be personally attached to Landon—"he would make a deuced fine soldier."

"Horse soldier," said the Colonel, cynically.

"Well, yes, perhaps I should have said 'horse soldier;'" and the two old fellows wagged their heads, in a manner that was far from complimentary to the cavalry branch of Her Majesty's service, always excepting the Royal Horse Artillery.

"There is something frank and dashing about him, however," continued the governor; "a certain freedom——"

"Damn his impudence; yes," broke in the Colonel. "He would make a most excellent officer, if we had war with the Amazons: he would do great execution among the women, I have no doubt."

From which outbreak, Sir Hercules Plummet, K.C.B., began to understand that he had been mistaken as to the personal interest felt by his old companion-in-arms, in Gentleman-cadet Landon. This by no means, however, altered his own views with respect to him; and the more so, since Ella happened to sit next to Sir Hercules at

dinner, one evening about this period, and made herself especially agreeable to him. The tough old general had a tender spot in his heart still, and had been always on terms of amity with the Amazons, with the exception of his own Thalestris—Lady Plummet.

"Why, Cecil dear, what makes you so radiant?" inquired Ella, as the young fellow came smiling into the little drawing-room, the Colonel being conveniently occupied with his cigar in the adjoining apartment. "You must be the bearer of some good news."

"To see you, darling, is to become radiant—by reflection," returned Cecil, gallantly; "but you are so far right that I have just been put in good spirits by Sir Hercules—and a very jolly old fellow he is, when you come to know him; he says that, provided I don't 'make a fool of myself as usual'—that was his way of putting it—there is every probability of my 'going out' in the same batch with Darall, and quite on the cards that I shall get the Sappers."

"I thought you didn't want to get the Sappers," replied Ella, tapping his cheek with the bouquet he had just brought for her, as his custom was; "I am afraid you are a little changeable, dear Cecil."

"Not I; I am as constant as the needle to

the North. But, somehow, I have got to like old Darall so much, that I would do almost anything to keep with him."

"What, even Work?"

"Yes, even work, Ella. I hate plan-drawing, and all that, but still, if we got in the same corps, we should be at Chatham together ever so long; and then," added he, with a briskness that betrayed the afterthought, "in case the governor proves implacable, one gets choice of quarters in the Engineers, so that even quite poor fellows in it get on very well, as married men."

"But we shall not be quite poor, in any case, Cecil."

"Well, of course not; but I shall feel more comfortable if I bring some grist to our mill that way, however little. One doesn't like to be entirely dependent, even upon one's wife."

"Doesn't one?" said Ella, gravely. "I think when two become one, there should be no thought as to which of them supplies the mere money. However, I should indeed regret if I proved the cause of what should have been your own being directed from you to other channels. It would, believe me, dear Cecil, embitter a cup however otherwise crowned with happiness."

"Oh, don't think of that, Ella. What is any inheritance compared with the future I have

found in you? Moreover, I shall have one thing that even my father cannot give me—a certain position. I know you laugh at all that with your advanced ideas; but I confess that to have 'cut the shop,' as the vulgar say——"

"Don't say what the vulgar say, Cecil," interrupted Ella, gravely, "it does not become you. And remember, 'cutting the shop,' as you have expressed it, involves more or less an estrangement from a kind and loving father; the heaviest cross he has to bear in life is the fact that your way in it and his are divided. Oh, dear Cecil, why should it be so?"

"Why should it? You wouldn't have me take to dyeing, I suppose? The thought sometimes comes across me that the very uniform I wear may have been in my father's vats, and I assure you it gives me quite a shudder."

"I cannot understand that feeling, dear Cecil; and we will not argue about it. Supposing, however, that you are ashamed of your father's trade; is there not a greater shame in the being alienated from your father's heart?"

"Oh! there is no alienation; the governor and I are not bad friends," said Cecil, carelessly. "He takes his way, and I mine—that's all. We are both perhaps a trifle obstinate; and it's just as well that we should not be too much together.

He gets on very well without me, you may take my word for it. He is not quite so sentimental, I don't say as you, because you are all sentiment, but as you imagine him to be, my darling."

"He is very fond of you, Cecil," said Ella, softly.

"Yes, he is fond of me, I daresay, in a sort of way. But you don't understand, dear Ella; you have not, that is, had to deal with a governor who has not a single idea in common with yourself, and who insists upon your accepting his views. Here is the question of our marriage, for instance. You think he will give in, but I know better."

"Cecil, darling," cried Ella, putting a little hand on each of his shoulders, "your father *has* given in."

"What? Have you heard from him? It is inconceivable."

"He has seen me, spoken to me—kissed me! I went up yesterday to Wethermill Street, and bearded the lion in his den; I call him so because of his magnanimity. His roar is worse than his bite, Cecil. He was very kind, and gentle, and good to me."

"And you mean to say, you cunning puss, you have really got the governor's consent to our marriage. How did you manage it? Did you

venture on the expedition all alone? And how did you pass the enchanted portal? I have always found a dragon of a clerk in the passage, who wants to know my business with my own father. Everything is business, business, business in that hateful hole."

"I found a great deal of pleasure there," said Ella, quietly. "But to be sure I made a conquest. If you jilt me, sir, your papa will marry me to-morrow."

"I have no doubt of it—who wouldn't?" replied Cecil, fondly. "I can scarcely, however, believe your story yet. It seems like an incongruous dream, or an extravaganza on the stage. The idea of such a beautiful fairy venturing into such a place as Wethermill Street! A Cave of Invoices! The Den of the Dyer! Coloured Effects! Subjugation of the Enchanter by means of Natural Beauty unaided by his wares! Vat's Vat, or The Mystery—which I am still 'dyeing' to hear. I believe I could have written punning extravaganzas myself, if my martial soul had not cried 'To arms!'"

"I am glad my news has put you into such good spirits, darling; though I won't have you laugh at your father. If he is an enchanter, he is a good one, and we have every cause to be thankful to him. His evident delight at being

reconciled to you—though he would fain have concealed it, for he is as proud and masterful as somebody else—would have gone to your heart, I know. He has consented to our marriage upon one condition, which, though you may think it a little hard at first——"

"Condition!" interrupted Cecil, quickly, "what condition!"

"Well, darling, we must give up that programme of our future—I shall be sorry for your sake, though not for my own—and consent to leave the army."

"What, and go into the dyeing trade?"

"Well, yes, my darling, instead of the killing trade."

She spoke with a light smile, which was not, however, reflected in Cecil's face.

"That is quite impossible," he answered, curtly. "When my father made that a condition of promising his consent to our marriage, he knew he would never be called upon to fulfil his promise. He was very sure that I would not perform my part of the contract. He has deceived you, Ella, and knowingly deceived you."

"No, Cecil, it is I who have deceived him. I thought that, for my sake, you would not have hesitated to sacrifice your own inclinations so far; and I promised for you."

She had drawn herself up to her full height, and her tones had an unaccustomed firmness and dignity. Cecil cast down his eyes in the presence of that reproachful gaze, and followed the pattern of the carpet with his foot.

"You should not have promised for me," said he, sullenly.

"I trusted in your word, Cecil," answered she, coldly; "it was there, it seems, that I made the mistake."

"In my word, Ella? I do not understand you. I never undertook—I don't say directly, but even by implication—to make such a sacrifice; to undergo such a humiliation. For your sake, of course, I would submit to almost anything——"

"Yesterday, Cecil, in this very room," interrupted she, "you said these words: 'I would do anything—anything—to oblige my father, except give my darling up.' It was upon the faith of them that I went up to Wethermill Street to-day."

"Did I really use those words?" said Cecil, hesitatingly.

"You did. Did you think I was likely to forget them—— Oh! Cecil, Cecil," she suddenly broke forth, "is my love then of such little worth, that it cannot be weighed against a few

years of distasteful toil? Nay, it will not be toil; a few hours a day, perhaps, passed in the City instead of the camp. Your future will be assured, and—what is better far, believe me, than any fortune—your place assured in your father's heart. If such a consideration does not move you, it will be useless, I fear, for me to add, as an inducement, that your father wishes us to be married immediately."

It was her turn now to cast down her eyes, and for her lover to lift his to her blushing face. She had felt that she was playing her last card, but it was a winning one.

"My darling," cried he, folding her in his arms, "I will go to Wethermill Street to-morrow, if you are really to come with me."

His lips did not utter another word, being otherwise employed.

"Ahem, ahem!" cried the Colonel, who entered the room a few minutes afterwards, with no little precautionary noise, but which nevertheless had not had the desired effect. "I really can't crack my throat with any more ahems. I never saw two young people so very much engaged as you are; never!"

"The occasion must excuse us, Colonel," said Landon, who had certainly considerable presence of mind—"The cheek of a whole regiment of

dragoons" was his host's term for it—"but the fact is, my father has to-day given his consent to our marriage."

"The devil he has," said the Colonel, in no very congratulatory tone of voice.

"Thank you, Uncle Gerard, for your felicitations," said Ella, with a pretty curtsy.

Then they all three had a hearty laugh, and two of them at least a happy evening.

But when Cecil had gone, and Ella had retired to her room, the smile faded from her lips, just as it had done the night before, and a shadow quenched the sunshine of her heart. The cause was not the same, though the same cause for sadness still existed. Her present pain arose from the very contemplation of her present happiness, or, rather, of the manner in which it had been secured. She could not forget the gloom that had come over Cecil's face, when she mentioned the condition of his father's consent to their union. With such a bliss in prospect—though it was true he had not then been told how near it was—his face should have worn no gloom. What conditions would have chilled *her* tone, or dulled the lovelight in *her* eyes? "None, none," her heart replied with passionate beat. Was she giving, then, more of love than she was receiving? A question not to be asked;

and yet, as she sat at her open window, under the quiet stars, she felt compelled to put it, and to have it answered. She had had to remind him of his words of promise, and even then he had hesitated to fulfil them. She felt ashamed and humbled. There had been a moment—though her tones had, she thanked Heaven, been gentle even then, and her gaze loving—when she had felt far from humble, when her heart was full of scorn and passion, and it had cost her a great effort to keep voice and eye in subjection. With many a pair of lovers there have been, doubtless, such times with one or the other, when a word or a look—speaking the truth within them—would have divided their ways for ever; but it seemed to poor Ella that it had been the case with her alone of all fond maidens. If she had spoken her mind, those words—she felt it—would have been the last between her and him to whom her whole being was devoted. She had not spoken them, it was true, and that burning indignation, and jealousy of she knew not what, had passed away from her soul for that time; but might they not return on some other occasion, and prove her ruin?

She had carried her point, but she had had to use her last argument; she had been victorious, but not without the help of her reserves. And

was there not future danger to her in the victory itself? There came into her mind something that her uncle had once told her about the tests applied to bridges: how a very great strain—greater, it was hoped, than they would ever have to bear—was made upon them, and if they bore it they were judged strong enough.

"But does not such a strain weaken the bridge?" she had inquired.

"Undoubtedly it does," he had replied; "but that is the only way we have of properly testing them."

She had tested her bridge, and it had carried her over in safety. But had not the experiment weakened it? For the moment, Cecil was her slave. The immediate prospect of his bliss had mastered him. If it had failed to do so, she would have been powerless indeed. Blinded by passion, he had consented—though not without resistance—to embrace a calling that was hateful to him. But when the passion had passed away, and the calling remained, how would it be with him; and might he not repent of the sacrifice?

At present, Cecil felt certainly no repentance, though his view of the case was not, perhaps, exactly as Ella pictured it. He walked back to the Academy, with heart elate and step as light as air.

"Darall, old fellow," cried he, breaking in upon his friend, who was working in his room as usual, "I have been and done it."

"Done what?" inquired Darall, with a glance at the other two occupants of the apartment, who were apparently fast asleep; but you can never tell when a cadet is asleep, nor—perhaps it should be added—could Darall ever tell what Landon might have done.

"I'm as bad as married. You have heard of dying for love. Well, I have given up my profession for love, and become a dyer."

"I don't believe it," was the quiet reply.

It cost his friend a great deal of explanation and protestation before he did believe it, and even then the result was not perfectly satisfactory.

"Well, I hope you know your own mind, old fellow," were Darall's concluding words.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DECISION.

Since the three principals connected with the contemplated partnership of Cecil and Ella were for a speedy settlement of that event, the preliminaries were carried on with unusual quickness. Three weeks from that evening on which Cecil consented to his father's conditions had brought the happy pair to the brink of wedlock, and but one clear day only intervened.

In the meantime a good deal had happened which, under other circumstances, would have been deemed important, but which had been dwarfed by the neighbourhood of the greater event. Cecil had been removed from the Royal Military Academy to the general regret—though with a few exceptions, as in the case of Gentleman-cadet Whymper, who looked forward to more

peaceful nights, if not to happier days—and formally made a partner in the house of Landon and Son, of Wethermill Street, and also of the West of England. A charming little furnished house had been taken near Hyde Park, for the reception of the bride and bridegroom after their honeymoon in the Lake District; Mr. Landon, senior, being of opinion that the "young people" had better have a home to themselves. A change of arrangements was, however, made necessary in the Colonel's case, who, deprived of the assistance of Ella's income, did not feel himself "justified" in continuing to inhabit Hawthorne Lodge; and he was once more returning to barracks, close to his old friend the Commissary.

The latter gentleman had the affliction—which he bore with the equanimity of a philosopher, if not with the submission of a Christian—of seeing his wife grow feebler and less sentient daily; but, on the other hand, he was gladdened by another circumstance. Ella had insisted upon giving Gracie, not only her dress as bridesmaid, but also a complete trousseau, just as though that young lady were about to be married herself.

"It will come very handy, and save my pocket," reflected the Commissary, "if anybody eligible should take a fancy to the girl;" though, at the same time, he confessed to himself that

"the girl" was not looking so attractive as heretofore. Just now it was quite as well that she should be "hanging on hand" in order to attend to her mother; but in view of certain contingencies, it would become expedient that she should alter her course of conduct. That she would alter it, when the time arrived, the Commissary had no grain of doubt; for what was at the bottom of her present behaviour were mere humours and crotchets, against which he flattered himself he possessed an antidote. If sentiment had ever led him to write an epitaph for his own tombstone, it would probably have been comprised in four words, concentrating, though without subliming, the essence of his character, "He stood no nonsense."

In this manner, and not otherwise (as is said in the classics), were matters progressing with the various personages in this history, up to a certain morning when the Colonel and Ella sat at breakfast at the Lodge together for the last time—for a marriage-breakfast is not to be counted in the ordinary catalogue of such meals. Mr. Landon, senior, was expected in a few hours, and Mr. Landon, junior—who had been in and out of the house on these latter days, as the Colonel poetically described it, "like a dog at a fair"—was likely to arrive in a few minutes. It was

probably the last occasion on which uncle and niece could count upon being alone together.

"I am afraid you have had a short night," said the Colonel, kindly, "for I heard you about your room till the small hours this morning. That is not the way to keep the roses in your cheeks for to-morrow, my dear."

"Yes, I had a bad night," returned Ella, gravely. "I could not sleep for thinking about —about that matter of the name. I have made up my mind to tell all to Cecil."

"It would be stark, staring madness," answered the Colonel.

"I am quite aware that your dislike to the person of whom we are both thinking," continued she, calmly, "induces you to wish me to defy him —to outrage his sense of what is right as much as possible. But in telling Cecil I shall not have swerved from my resolution in that respect. No one else need know except my husband."

"If you tell him he would never consent to be your husband."

"Why should you say that?"

"Because I know the man. In the first place, I doubt whether he would forgive you the past deception. He is a man of honour, and naturally frank; the school in which he has been

brought up, too, is, I am glad to say, one in which truth is respected."

"You were brought up in it yourself," answered she, scornfully, "and yet have been an accessory to what you please to call my deception."

"It is like a woman to throw that in my face," retorted the Colonel, angrily. "Just as though one had given some persecuted wretch an asylum under one's roof, and he should say, 'You have knowingly harboured a criminal.' If it was dislike to another as much as liking to yourself that caused me to befriend you, it does not lie in your mouth to say so."

"Don't let us quarrel, uncle, on our last day together. I was wrong to taunt you; forgive me. I want your best advice, or rather the best reasons you have to urge in favour of that silence which, I confess, gives me great uneasiness. Cecil will find out my secret some day, and then it will be the worse for me."

"It will not be pleasant, I have no doubt, but he will be your husband by that time; if you have played your cards well, he will forgive you all, for love of you; if not, he must still stick to you. It will merely make 'a scene' between you; or, at most, a quarrel of greater or less

duration. But, as I say, in the first place, if you tell him now, resentment may make him fly off the hook altogether; and, in the second, it is certain, even if he forgives you, that he will not be a party to the continuance of such a state of things. He will insist upon the truth being told to-morrow."

"Never," cried Ella, passionately. "He will never make me break my oath."

"Then you will keep it, and lose him. He will slip out of the halter just as you are putting it over his head. You have asked for my opinion, and there it is."

And the Colonel took up the newspaper, and hid his face behind its columns.

"Uncle Gerard, listen to me. All you have said only makes me more resolved——"

"Naturally, my dear," said the Colonel, bitterly; "that is a family characteristic."

"I say I am resolved to risk it. I cannot, I dare not, deceive Cecil, when I know that some day or another he must come to know it—— If you sneer like that, you coward, you will drive me mad."

The Colonel had certainly chuckled in rather an aggravating manner; but the provocation seemed hardly proportionate to the effect. Ella's countenance was distorted with rage. It was as

though one of the Graces had changed places, while retaining her beauty, with one of the Furies. Her uncle, too, looked the very picture of curbed passion, and though he had no beauty to lose, it was curious to see how strongly the family likeness came out between them.

"Pray go on, madam," said he, stiffly. "This is your house so long as you choose to stay in it, and, if you carry out your present plan, you will be its tenant for some time to come. Say just what you please, I beg."

"It is cruel and unkind, Uncle Gerard," resumed she, more calmly, "that you will not control yourself——"

The Colonel lifted up his hand. "Control *my*self! that is a good joke," the action seemed to say.

"And because," she went on, "the subject of discussion stirs your anger, that you should thus turn on me. I must revert to it for a few moments; bear with me a little, since it is for the last time. Here is the record—word for word, so far as I can remember, and the memory of it, Heaven help me! is not like to fade—of what took place at Gadsden. I wrote it out last night, and propose, to-day, to place it in Cecil's hands. It will, at least, excuse my conduct in his eyes, if it does not justify it."

The Colonel shook his head, and, with an incredulous smile, took the paper she held out to him.

"Read that," she said, pointing with her finger; "all that goes before is explanatory of my life at home."

The Colonel looked up after a minute.

"But I know this, also: this is the last *tableau* very *vivant*, is it not, as you described it to me?"

"Yes; but I wish you to read it. If there is anything different—anything extenuated on my own part, or set down in malice on another's—tell me."

The Colonel read on in silence to the end.

"It seems to me a fair account," observed he, coldly.

"It is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing——"

"There, there! you are not in a court of justice!" exclaimed he, impatiently; "and when folks make oaths only to break them——"

"I don't intend to break mine, Uncle Gerard. If Cecil takes the view you anticipate, I shall not give in. My heart will be broken, that's all. But I mean to show him this." And she touched the paper with her forefinger.

"You mean to put that statement in his hand, do you?"

"I do."

"Then, let me tell you, if you do so, and you should gain your point, that your marriage will become invalid."

"Invalid!" She pressed her hand upon her heart, then glared at him with eyes of fire. "You will say anything to have your way, Uncle Gerard. I don't believe you."

"Your manners are not good this morning, Ella. However, it is not a question of my word, but of what the law says." He rose, unlocked a desk, and took from it a document neatly folded. "Here is Mr. Pawson's opinion, given on the hypothetical case you bade me lay before him. As matters now stand, it says the marriage is a good one. If you show Cecil that statement—— You can read what the man writes for yourself: 'The marriage, if it should take place under present circumstances, is void.'"

Ella leant over the paper, written out in a clear and legal hand, and read over the words he pointed out again and again.

"Well, girl; have I spoken truth or falsehood?"

"Truth, Uncle Gerard. I was wrong to

doubt you—wrong, too, to anger so the only friend I have in the world."

"Nay; say, rather, the only friend who can make allowance for your temper, Ella, 'knowing which way it comes.' Come, if we must part—and, believe me, I grieve that it has come to that—let us part good friends. Kiss me, dear."

She embraced him affectionately. Her passion seemed to have been wholly swept away by some stronger feeling. Her tall frame trembled with emotion; and she was pale to the very lips.

He put the "opinion" in his desk again, and, pointing to the other paper—the "statement" as he called it—said:

"I think you had better tear that up, Ella."

"No, uncle." She folded it up carefully, and placed it in her bosom. "Cecil shall never see it; but it will be a witness to myself—that I had, at least, intended to be frank and true to him. I perceive that it is not in my power to be so."

"Not if you wish to be Cecil Landon's wife."

Here the gate-bell rang, and Ella's colour rushed back to her face; she drew back into a corner of the room, while her uncle walked to the window.

"It is not Cecil," said he. "It is the old

hunks himself. He must have sat up all night to get here by this time, unless he got up in the City at sunrise. What a twenty-four hours is before us! I look to you to see me through it, Ella."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WEDDING.

MARRIAGES are not so frequent in garrison-towns as might be wished, and, indeed, *are* wished. I have heard an experienced military matron, with six married military daughters, declare, notwithstanding her success—or, perhaps, because of it—that officers in the army, looked at from a matrimonial point of view, like that celebrated horse described in the pages of Mr. Joseph Miller, have but two faults. They are hard to catch, and, when they are caught, they are good for nothing.

And if the bridegrooms in such localities are commonly persons of small income—which is what the lady meant—how much more is this the case with the brides, who are, of course, the daughters of those who in their time have

been "good for nothing," and inherit their parents' property?

Miss Ella Mayne was that *rara avis*, an heiress, and her wedding would have made a great sensation in any case, but since she married a young gentleman with money, the excitement was doubled. It was Ella's particular desire to have as quiet a wedding as possible—as may be concluded from her having but one bridesmaid—but "society" was not to be balked in that way, and it was certain that the church would be crowded with spectators.

She had not many acquaintances, however, to whom to make her adieux, and Mrs. Ray and her daughter were the only two who could be called her friends.

The former, of course, could not be present at the ceremony, and Ella came to wish her good-bye, in private, upon the day before it; not even Gracie was present. A magnificent lace collar, begun by the invalid, in days when she had the free use of her now failing hands, and finished by her daughter, was the single marriage present from them both.

"I shall prize it as much as this locket of dear Cecil's," said Ella, with much emotion; and certainly no words from her mouth could have

expressed a deeper sense of acknowledgment. Nothing else could she say at that moment, for the sense that her visit was a farewell one for ever, weighed heavily on her heart. Mrs. Ray herself, however, was calm and cheerful.

"You should not weep for me, darling, but rather rejoice that my time of rest is almost come. The promise you have given me as to Gracie has made my burthen light for the end of my journey."

"It will be kept," whispered Ella, earnestly.

"I know it. She will do her duty by her father so long as he needs it—she is Duty itself, you know—but when he marries again, she may have to seek another home."

"When he marries again!" repeated Ella, horrified that her companion should speak of such a contingency at such a time. "He will surely never do anything so shameful."

"He has been thinking about it ever so long, my dear," replied the invalid, quietly. "I hope he will be happier with her—whoever she may be—than he has been with me. But I don't think Gracie will be happy with her."

"I should think not, indeed," said Ella, scornfully. This projected union of the far-sighted Commissary was certainly more hateful to her on account of her own approaching

nuptials. It seemed abominable that the bliss of matrimony should be shared by her and Cecil in some sort, as it were, in common with this hard-hearted, hard-headed, vulgar, despicable old man. The contrast of her own immediate view of life, all brightness and rose colour, with what this poor lady's must needs be, gave her, too, for the instant, a sense of resentment that was almost disgust. Surely people had no reason to be so miserable! Then her better nature asserted itself, and she took the other's almost impassive hand in her own, and pressed it affectionately.

"If I can ever do anything, dear Mrs. Ray——"

"For Gracie," interrupted the invalid, smiling, "you will do it; of that I am certain."

It was terrible to hear a living woman thus talk of herself! as though she were already in her grave.

"As for me, darling," she went on, "you will never see me again in this world. If I see you, and you are in trouble, and I have not the means of helping you, then the other world will be for me a sad one—also."

Her tone was not one of complaint, but the pathos of that "also" went to the listener's heart.

"It is selfish of me to make you sad, Ella, and very ungrateful. If the kiss I give you now could express all the tenderness and good-will I feel for you, it would be almost as sweet as that of your lover's to-day, or of your bridegroom to-morrow."

Ella had rarely known her invalid friend so demonstrative in her regard, and certainly never so poetic in the expression of it. There had been a romance, she began to understand, even in this poor lady's life, at one time; though it had ended so prosaically. Was it possible that she might, one day, awaken from her own dream of bliss to some such grim reality?

Not till long after that sad parting was over did Ella become herself again, and even a meeting with Cecil scarcely effaced its memory.

Mr. Landon, senior, was more than gracious to her; the favourable impression she had made upon him, from the first, had deepened, and he humorously informed the Colonel that if "Master Cecil" should be *non est* at the last moment, he, Bart. Landon, was prepared to supply the deficiency, and marry Ella himself off-hand. It was a picture to see the Colonel's face as he received these pleasantries and grinned at them.

"I may not have done much for you hitherto,

my dear Ella," he frankly told her, "but, by jingo! I have made up for it within these twelve hours. In addition to all his other horrible qualities, this father-in-law elect of yours is a wag."

After dinner, while the two men sat over their wine ("that rogue Cecil," as he called him, having stolen away from them into the drawing-room), Mr. Landon was in dreadfully high spirits.

He confided to the Colonel how much he expected to "turn over" in the course of the year, in trade; which indeed ought to have been considerable, considering the value of the diamonds he had given Ella for a marriage-gift; and even whispered into his astonished ear a secret or two of the dyeing business. "When you and I go, Colonel, as we soon must——"

"Pray speak for yourself," snapped the Colonel, who had the greatest objection to any reference to his own decease.

"Well, well, there can be but a very few years between us. I say, when we do go, there will be doubtless something worth having for our young people. I am not one to place an undue value upon money; but it makes things move smoothly. And of course it is a satisfaction to me to see your Ella situated similarly to my own boy; that is as to relatives. If she had a tribe

of brothers and sisters, it would be so much the worse for him. And even fathers-in-law and mothers-in-law are apt to interfere with a man's happiness."

"I don't think I would mention that ground of satisfaction to Ella," said the Colonel, dryly.

"No, no, of course not; and, to be sure, I had forgotten that her mother must have been your sister. Has her father been dead long, poor fellow?"

"Really, Mr. Landon, the whole subject is extremely painful to me."

"Then I won't mention it. At our time of life I have noticed men are not generally so sensitive upon such matters; but it does you honour. You look warm, let us go into the other room; the young folks ought not to resent it, for they will have one another's company to-morrow, and for years to come, I hope."

The perspiration did indeed stand upon the Colonel's forehead, though not from the cause his companion supposed. "It surely would not be murder," he was thinking, "if I were to strangle such a fellow." He had expected to find his guest a bore and a nuisance, by reason of the shyness and embarrassment that would probably overcome a man in his position upon finding himself in such company as Colonel

Gerard Juxon's, upon equal terms. He had made up his mind to be affable, and to put a restraint upon that forcible manner in which he was wont to express himself, for the sake of this timorous tradesman. But so far from these expectations having been fulfilled, Mr. Bartholomew Landon had held his own, and something more than his own, during that day at Hawhtorne Lodge; and, so far from being overwhelmed with any sense of social inferiority, had rather patronised his host than otherwise. It is needless to say therefore how the Colonel loathed him. With Ella, on the other hand, her future father-in-law was a favourite, while his presence in the house that day was welcome to her upon another account. After that interview after breakfast with her uncle, she shrank from being left alone with him, from some vague apprehension, though probably groundless, that the topic of the morning might be again alluded to. She had given up her point, being overcome by his argument, but her defeat was gall and wormwood to her. It overshadowed that eve, which, of all eves, should have been a happy one; and even when night came round, it found her wakeful, and full of doubt and disappointment, instead of blissful thoughts and blissful dreams. In the morning, however, though her face was pale, she looked

every inch a bride, and drew forth the most genuine encomiums from her future father-in-law.

"I don't think you want mountain air to improve *you*, my dear, and I still think it would have been more judicious if you had gone for your bridal trip to Birmingham."

This was an allusion to the intention of the young couple to pass their honeymoon in the Lake District, about which there had been three opinions. Mr. Landon, senior, had suggested that that interval of leisure might be advantageously employed by Cecil in the midland metropolis, in picking up certain commercial ideas. This suggestion had been received with some irreverence and a good deal of mirth. Cecil himself had proposed Scarborough, as being a lively place, and without much reference, I am afraid, to its natural beauties; but Ella had been very strong against Scarborough. The whole Yorkshire coast, she said, was familiar to her, but if Cecil liked the North, why should they not select the Lakes? And the Lakes had, accordingly, been fixed upon.

"We'll come back by Birmingham," said Ella, replying laughingly to Mr. Landon's remark, "and study all the latest mechanical improvements."

"Yes, I daresay; and keep my boy there

a week under pretence of learning them, instead of bringing him home to work," returned the old gentleman. "Oh, Miss Ella, I hope you will give up your deceptive ways. I have not forgiven you yet, remember, the way you humbugged me about that contract."

"What was that?" inquired the Colonel, who knew nothing of Ella's visit to Wethermill Street. Mr. Landon read in her face that her uncle had not heard of it, and laughed tumultuously.

"Upon my word you are a sad puss," he said. "Well, I mustn't tell tales out of school, Colonel. She has bamboozled both of us, that's all. And yet, to look at her, one would think she had not a secret in the world."

There was no paleness in Ella's cheek now; her face was in a glow from brow to chin; the Colonel's features too began to work in a manner that, to those who had studied the nature of that volcanic soil, gave notice of an explosion.

Fortunately, at that moment Gracie made her appearance and diverted the conversation, but it did not escape even Mr. Landon that he had been treading upon dangerous ground.

When, a few minutes afterwards, he happened to be left alone with Ella, he addressed her with tender gravity.

"My darling," said he, "I feel I was very nearly putting my foot into it just now with your uncle. If I had known you had not told him about your visit to me, of course I would not have adverted to it; but was it worth while to be so secret? As for me, when my old eyes are hoodwinked by such pretty hands as yours, I rather like it. But I think it right to warn you not to have any secrets from Cecil; his character is frank to a fault, and—— Ah! here comes your confederate. I was just giving Ella a lecture, Miss Ray, upon deception, at which you also ought to have been present. I daresay your father knows nothing of your visit to me about the Government contract. Now just suppose I were to tell him!"

"I don't think he would mind very much if you did," returned Gracie, laughing.

"Ah, you are incorrigible, I see; but Ella, I am glad to say, is sorry for her misdeeds."

And, indeed, Ella was looking grave enough. She had not bargained for being lectured on her marriage-day, and there were other reasons that made Mr. Landon's admonition distasteful to her. However, it was no time for discouraging thoughts. The carriage had come to take all four of them to church, where she would require all the presence of mind needed by a bride, and

more. The "sacred edifice," as the local newspaper afterwards described it, "was thronged with fashionable spectators," though the marriage-party itself, including, as it did, the Commissary and Mr. Landon, could hardly have been described as fashionable. The former gentleman had been asked in consideration of his daughter's services, and came in uniform, with white trousers, which some faint recollection of festivities in out-of-the-way climes had caused him to put on in honour of the occasion.

"My good fellow," whispered the Colonel, grimly, "you have made a slight mistake; it is only the bride that should appear in white, and you are not the bride, you know, nor anything like it."

It was disagreeable for the Commissary to find Mr. Hugh Darall in the post of Cecil's "best man" (though he might have taken as much for granted), since his last interview with that young gentleman had been far from agreeable. But not much regard was paid to the Commissary's sour looks, or even to his "duck" trousers; all eyes were fixed upon the young couple who stood in front of the altar-rails, a picture "to make an old man young." A handsomer pair it would have been hard to find, or (which is better) a more winsome; for Cecil had such a face as bespeaks for its

possessor the goodwill of the beholder, and Ella's had none of that haughtiness which, in women, so often accompanies (and detracts from) exceptional beauty. She held her head high too, and had a certain listening and expectant air, such as the stag assumes when doubtful tidings are borne to him upon the mountain wind. So marked was this when the priest inquired whether either of them knew of any impediment to their being joined together, that the fancy struck one of the congregation that she looked as if she apprehended interruption, and was prepared to strike it down. No such inauspicious incident, however, marred the ceremony which made Cecil and Ella man and wife. In the vestry a curious circumstance took place: as the bride was about to sign her name for the last time, her newly-made father-in-law whispered something in her ear. It was only, "Don't you sign the wrong name, my dear."

Yet Ella dropped the pen, and uttered an ejaculation of dismay.

"Why, I surely haven't frightened you?" observed the old gentleman. "I meant that you were not to sign your married name, as most girls do in their hurry to show they've caught a husband; it was only my little joke, bless you."

"And it was only that I was a little nervous, just at the moment," answered Ella, sweetly, as she wrote her name in the usual quick, bold hand.

The Colonel had turned his back upon them both, and become suddenly interested in the long rows of parish account-books which stood over his head; but his face grew crimson, and had not resumed its natural colour, which was that of the best description of parchment, when it came to his turn to sign the register.

His guest from the City had certainly not been successful in pleasing him by his conversation during their short acquaintanceship; nor was he more felicitous with the Commissary at the marriage-breakfast. He was one of those merry old gentlemen who will have their jokes, and he took upon himself to propose the health of the bridesmaid. There was but one, he said, which he thought hard upon "us gentlemen," and even that one, it was obvious, was bespoken; at the same time giving Mr. Hugh Darall a waggish poke with his elbow. It is probable that no harmless pleasantry had, up to that time, succeeded in making so many persons, at once, uncomfortable, as did that unlucky observation.

Darall, of course, became a peony; Gracie,

a rose; and the Commissary, no flower at all, but the hue of an inferior silk, shot with green and yellow.

"Now he *has* done it," muttered the Colonel, as though the worthy merchant had at last arrived at the *ne plus ultra* of his colloquial offences. But it is doubtful even if he did not cap that, in a certain, apparently very innocent, remark which he made, as he left the house, after the bride and bridegroom had departed.

"You need not trouble yourself to put the little affair that has happened to-day in the newspapers, Colonel; that is a business matter which lies more in my way than yours, and, if you will give me the necessary instructions, I will direct one of my clerks to get it done this afternoon."

"The devil you will!" ejaculated the Colonel.

"Well, why not? It is of no great consequence, I suppose, which of us pays the few shillings for the advertisement. You don't think the proposition a liberty, I hope?"

If eyes could speak, the Colonel's answer would have been, "I think it a dashed piece of impertinence, sir;" but what his voice said

was, "I think it a matter that should be left in my hands, Mr. Landon."

"Very good; then you will see to it."

The merchant's judgment of the Colonel's capacity as a man of business was a correct one, as was afterwards effectually demonstrated by the fact that the marriage of Cecil Landon with Ella Mayne was never recorded in any newspaper, save the local one, or advertised even there.

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